

COST OF LIVING — FEES AND CHARGES

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts) informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [3.14 pm]: I move —

That this house supports immediately freezing all government fees and charges to provide much-needed support to help Western Australians through the cost-of-living crisis.

That is indeed what we are facing, members. We are facing challenges right across the state, with more and more families unable to pay their bills, keep a roof over their heads and pay for their groceries and fuel, yet on the other hand we have a government sitting on a \$5.7 billion surplus. We are the epicentre of the nation's cost-of-living crisis. That is being said by not only us as the opposition, key stakeholder groups like Anglicare and Foodbank and respected leaders like Mark Glasson and others who are dealing with the pointy end of this cost-of-living crisis, and the media, but also the newly installed Prime Minister, who was very clear about this as we went into the federal election. This is what the McGowan government is presiding over and has delivered to the people of Western Australia. It is sitting on a \$5.7 billion surplus. It has had five years in government and two massive budget surpluses, and we are the epicentre of the nation's cost-of-living crisis.

Let us be very clear: at this time, Western Australians are struggling to make ends meet and scrambling to find affordable housing. Every single member of Parliament in this chamber will have had people in their electorate office saying that they are about to find themselves homeless. We are not and cannot be the only ones dealing with that crisis. People are concerned that they will be left in the back of an ambulance because the ambulances are ramped up outside hospitals in a broken health system. They are concerned that they will be unable to continue to pay their mortgages or rent as we see interest rates rise and rents go through the roof, yet we have a government with \$5.7 billion locked away, delivered by iron ore royalties, GST that was negotiated and delivered by the former coalition government and record tax income. Stamp duty is up as well as other fees and charges that this government has control of and could reduce to provide relief to the people of Western Australia. We have a government that decided to increase those fees and charges. It was an active decision. When the government went to hand down its budget, it had the opportunity to provide relief or to be tone deaf to those people who are struggling and put those charges up regardless. I have to say that the cost to the state government would be minimal in the context of the budget surplus if the government were to freeze those fees and charges that we are talking about.

Mr D.J. Kelly: How much would it cost?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I can tell the minister; I have it written here somewhere in my pages. If the minister continues to listen, I will get to it, but I am not going to take interjections from him. The minister was not listening at the time the opposition and the shadow Treasurer responded to the budget. It was outlined in our response at the time. I am not going to spend any more time talking to the minister, because he did not listen when we outlined what we thought his government should have done when it had the chance, and now, six weeks or however long we are from when the budget was handed down, we have only gone in the wrong direction. More and more families are feeling the pinch, and the minister is still maintaining that he cannot and will not support them, despite the fact that his government is sitting on a \$5.7 billion surplus.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I do not want to hear from that minister, Acting Speaker.

This government decided to increase fees and charges to make it a little bit more difficult for every family in this state. In the first six budgets that this government presided over, it increased household fees and charges by \$1 050 a year. This year, with \$5.7 billion locked away in the kitty, this government has increased driver's licence fees by 6.4 per cent, car registration is going up by 3.8 per cent, motor vehicle insurance is up by 2.4 per cent, water charges are up by 2.5 per cent and the emergency services levy is going up by five per cent. We have also seen food prices on the increase. This is a direct result of farmers being, essentially, forced to pass on the costs that they are absorbing, so customers have to pay more at the supermarket. Farmers have seen steep increases in transport costs—up to 50 per cent—and fertiliser costs are up by 300 per cent. That is compounded by the fact that we have no labour in Western Australia to help with the picking or to manage that process for the agricultural sector. That sounds like a long bow to draw, but this state has locked people out for the last two years. This state is led by a Premier who is very arrogant when it comes to talking about our interstate colleagues and attracting and retaining workers from over east and overseas. I can tell members that the view on the east coast is that people will not come.

Several members interjected.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Dave Kelly; Ms Emily Hamilton; Mr Shane Love;
Acting Speaker

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I do, but I do not have to go over there to know it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday): Leader of the Opposition, if you could direct your conversation to me, then the minister will not interject.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The Premier is on a global apology tour for being so arrogant that he has alienated every person outside Western Australia. Now they all look at us and say, “We won’t be coming over there, thanks very much, no matter how good you say it is.” It is not just the fact that the government, from a budget perspective, had the opportunity to freeze those fees and charges, given it had such a significant surplus. It is also the fact that it is not doing anything to try to ameliorate those challenges that other sectors are forced to deal with so that they can reduce the pressure for people at the supermarket and provide services and goods to the people of WA. We have a massive royalty income, and increases in tax income, stamp duty, payroll tax and the GST have put the government in a very solid position. It is not good management; it is good fortune. It is a very solid position, yet it will not share it with the people of Western Australia. It is odd, heartless and just plain mean on behalf of the Premier; Treasurer to deny that he has access to levers that could immediately provide relief to those people whom we see every day struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

I am sure the shadow Minister for Energy and Leader of the Liberal Party will have something to say about this. Over summer, nearly 111 000 Synergy customers could not pay their power bills. Fuel prices had skyrocketed, but there was an opportunity to assist even just a small cohort of people through the budget process. We asked for relief through the Country Age Pension Fuel Card, but that was not to be. We asked for an increase in the rate in the dollar for the patient assisted travel scheme for those, particularly in regional Western Australia, who do not have access to public transport and have to rely on their cars and motor vehicles with fuel prices going up. But no; they were both ignored. They were both denied. Against the backdrop of key welfare groups, such as Anglicare, warning that families have to choose between eating and electricity, this government said no to all those things that it could have included in its budget. That is why we bring this motion, because the government has another chance to show some compassion for the people of Western Australia and actually freeze those charges for a year to let everyone catch up.

Western Australians were worried about their budgets and the cost of living before the state budget was handed down, and all that the state budget and subsequent roll-on impacts have done is to make things worse. They could see interest rates going up, they were struggling to find a house on the rental market, and rental and petrol prices were going up. Even the federal coalition government, before the last election, found the opportunity to provide relief at the bowser. This government has done nothing; despite having a multibillion-dollar surplus for the second year running, it is stingy, miserly and hoarding that surplus away. I ask members who are sitting in this chamber: when you are dealing with people in their electorates, are you proud of that massive surplus when you put that against the number of people who are seeking assistance from Foodbank, which has gone from assisting 200 families a day to over 500 in Perth? Is the government proud of that? It has a \$5.7 billion surplus and WA the wealthiest state in the nation. The Premier takes every opportunity to laud it over people, other Premiers and anybody who will listen that we have a massive budget surplus, yet we have people working two jobs trying to pay their bills and keep a roof over their head who are genuinely fronting up to Foodbank for the first time in their life. Do members think they are worried about what this Premier thinks is an amazing achievement? They are worried about putting food on the table for their kids, all while more and more families join them in that line. All those organisations that I speak to, whether it is Anglicare, Foodbank, OzHarvest or St Vinnies, say there is a cohort of people they have never seen walk across the threshold of their organisations. Something is not right in the wealthiest state in the nation when all those organisations are saying that they are dealing with more and more people under pressure.

The government could not possibly be proud of headlines like “Anglicare WA pleads for Mark McGowan to ‘show compassion’ to struggling West Aussie families” from an article in *The West Australian* of Sunday, 12 June. Mark Glasson, the CEO of Anglicare, has been very, very clear. The article states —

Mr Glasson said the WA Government’s one-off, \$400 household electricity credit simply wasn’t enough.

...

“Single parent families, older women, young people are still being forced into homelessness by ongoing rent increases and rising energy costs. We know this—because we are supporting them.

The face of this challenge are families like the Walker family. Chloe and Richard Walker spoke to *The West Australian* about the pressures as a double-income, two-children family. The article from Saturday, 11 June, written by Kim Macdonald states —

By the time the pair had saved enough for a deposit on a home—which required selling a car—property prices had boomed.

They paid \$710,000 for a house in ... the same postcode where more than 40 per cent of families spend more than they earn.

Mrs Walker, 30, has had to return to full-time work as an insurance broker to help boost the family budget and make ends meet.

But, along with her husband's wage as a driller, the pair are deemed to earn too much to qualify for any financial support.

"The government has got to do something to make it easier for families, like lowering the taxes for working mums," she said.

"We were constantly living pay cheque to-pay cheque. There were so many weeks where we couldn't afford to do anything and that was very, very challenging.

...

She said the pinch was being felt in her neighbourhood, noting barely any shoppers were at the Ellenbrook Central shopping centre recently, and that half the stores were closed.

Again, another family, this time from 2 May, before the budget was brought down, belling the challenges that people were facing in electorates right across the state. It states —

The sustained low vacancy rate across the pandemic has resulted in rents rising to an average of \$50 more per week since 2021, capturing more people in housing stress.

Dawesville resident Lisa Dodson and her family have felt the effects first-hand.

Living with her two sons Mitchell, 22, and Daniel, 20, Daniel's partner, and Dodson's mother Julie has been the only way they can all afford a home.

The family pay \$350 per week for a four-bedroom property. Dodson sleeps in the lounge room so there is a room spare to hold the excess belongings of five people.

...

She said her son Mitchell was working three part-time jobs and still struggling to find somewhere he could afford.

Her other son, Daniel, had been living elsewhere for about six months, but was in a ... neighbourhood where he was broken into on multiple occasions.

Her mother is on a waitlist to move into a retirement home, but the wait is 10 years long. On her pension payments, she cannot afford another place while she waits.

"I have a full-time job as a resource worker at Parenting Connection WA and I deliver food hampers through Anglicare WA. I don't think I could afford anywhere on my own right now either," Dodson said.

...

"The market is so tough ... the stories I hear through my work are even more heartbreaking. There is no fun in their lives, no sports activities or weekend trips with their kids, they are just surviving from one bill to the next."

This is the wealthiest state in the nation.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: You are on thin ice, minister.

This is a state government that has a \$5.7 billion surplus with a significant amount of income flowing into the coffers and it had an opportunity to act.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Acting Speaker, I am not taking interjections.

The government had an opportunity to make sure that families like these were not impacted as seriously as they are by freezing household fees and charges. For a matter of millions of dollars in the context of a multibillion-dollar surplus, this government could easily relieve the burden for Western Australians. The WA economy is leading the nation for inflation. This government has the levers it can pull and the means to do it, but it chooses not to. This is about priorities. It just does not add up when we have such a massive budget surplus and a government with no compassion for those who are struggling. It does not add up when we have an arrogant Premier ramming our healthy budget down the throats of every other state while his own constituents struggle.

The opposition is continuing to call for a freeze on fees and charges to provide immediate relief to Western Australians. We want this government to use some of those funds to make sure that every Western Australian has a fair

opportunity to keep a roof over their head, pay their bills and make sure that their family can live comfortably. If government members look these people in the eye when they come into their electorate offices and cannot say that they are arguing for that around the cabinet table or taking it to cabinet, they are failing in their jobs. It is unconscionable for the government to have this budget surplus when so many families are struggling—absolutely unconscionable! Every single member of this Parliament should be doing more to try to address these challenges. Otherwise, the only conclusion we can draw is that this government has lost its way in terms of priorities, and it is stingy, it is miserly and it is arrogant. That is coming from not only the opposition, but also every welfare organisation that is dealing with the fallout of this government's unwillingness to address the cost-of-living pressures. The government has the chance to fix it. I urge the government to do more.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.30 pm]: I find it fascinating when we have these debates. There is an arrogance on the other side. Government members think they are the only people who care. They think they have a special conscience that somehow makes them more empathetic to these issues and that they can dismiss the discussion on the opposition side of the chamber. All government members sit in caucus. All the ministers sat in cabinet and approved a budget that will substantially increase the costs for Western Australian households. Furthermore, they have now been doing that for over five years. The increases in costs that this government has applied to households are way above the rate of inflation. The government says that it cares about struggling households, but you know what? It is going to belt them between the eyes. Why? I think we know why. It is because the government is saving up a war chest for the next election. The government thought that whatever the circumstances might be—those circumstances have changed more than most of us realised—it would be okay for this election. The government will have a great big war chest for the next election. Meanwhile, Western Australians are suffering because of not only the costs that the government has put on households, but also the government's inaction on a number of fronts during its term in government.

The West Australian had an excellent front page that outlined the problem that ordinary Western Australians are facing. Jeanie Barbagiovanni is on that front page with her beautiful young children. She talked about the difficulties that she faces every day in dealing with the issues. She is seeing the pain that is being inflicted on her family in the decisions that they have to make. Rather than being able to fill up the car with petrol, she has to eke out every dollar and put in only a few dollars of fuel in the hope that she can get her children around and do all the things she has to do with her family. Some of the price rises that have occurred are not in the immediate control of this government, but many of them are. Many of these issues could have been solved if this government had taken action earlier. I will not go through the article in too much detail, but Jeanie referred to electricity costs of almost \$20 a day this summer. This is not a person who is whooping it up with a swimming pool and spa. This is someone who has three children and is trying to get by and trying to keep them cool in summer and warm in winter. She is typical of families all over Western Australia who are suffering exactly the same pressures.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia recently carried out a survey on confidence. That was also reported in *The West Australian*. The survey looked at the cost of living and interest rate hikes and how they weigh on consumer sentiment. The CCIWA survey reveals that the majority of Western Australians are feeling the pressure and struggling to pay their bills day to day. That is causing enormous pain.

An article on ABC News that was published on 12 May also did a good analysis of this. It quotes Louise Giolitto, a person with whom I have spoken a good number of times since I have been in this role. She refers to the inadequacy of the \$400 power bill rebate. As she says —

“That \$400 won't go very far because we're talking about 12 per cent increases in rental prices, we've got a 7.6 per cent increase in inflation, we've got real stagnation in wages,” ...

That outlines the problems that people are facing. Government members know that she is someone who sees these problems and issues every day. It is pretty straightforward for most families. Families have a hierarchy of needs. People need somewhere to live, people need food to eat and people need to be able to get around and do all the things that people normally do.

Turning to housing, the inaction of this government over its term has led to the housing crisis that we have now. We see some perverse action by the Premier that, I think, is exacerbating rather than solving the problem. The Premier will be travelling to the eastern states and other places to tell people that they should come to Western Australia. However, as was pointed out very well by Ben Harvey in his program *Up Late with Ben Harvey*, the Premier is asking people to come to Western Australia, but there is nowhere for them to stay, in effect. The Premier is saying to people, “Come over here”, but the government cannot put a roof over their heads.

I echo the comments of the Leader of the Opposition. The gratuitous insults that the Premier made constantly during the COVID-19 lockdown about people on the east coast have caused enormous harm to our reputation in the eastern states. I have a son who is in Sydney. His friends tell him that they will never come to Western Australia because of the nasty comments that Premier Mark McGowan made about people on the east coast. That is what they say.

Mr P.J. Rundle interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: We heard that repeated again today. We now see, as an aside, that the government, in an act of desperation, is offering \$119 airfares to people on the east coast. That is how much the Premier has harmed the reputation of people in this state.

An analysis by the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia has revealed the shockingly low number of rentals available in Perth. It said that in May this year, across 12 suburbs in Perth just one rental property was up for grabs. Anyone who has seen what is happening with rental properties would know that we are back to the days of lines of people outside rental properties. The REIWA website shows that today, only 123 houses with a weekly rent of \$400 a week or less are available in Perth. The Minister for Housing has talked about this before and has said that we are selectively picking out houses. People who have children want a house. I was at the Cat Haven the other day. People who have pets also want a house. Most apartment owners will not allow people to have a pet. Rent inflation is increasing. During April and May, the median weekly rent in Perth increased by \$20 a month. That means that families who are renting a home have to pay an average increase in rent of \$1 000 per annum.

The reason we are raising this issue is that it was within the control of the government. As we have said, in this government's first term, it decreased the amount of social housing. My understanding is that despite the fact that the new Minister for Housing is full of enthusiasm, the government has not caught up to the 1 300 houses that it sold off. I have said before that, unfortunately, it is a bit of a suicide path for this minister, in that the government's inaction in the previous Parliament has put him in the invidious situation of having to justify the impossible; that is, the government does not have enough social housing places, and, more generally, it has not done enough to encourage the supply of rental accommodation. This is not a new problem. This problem has been building during the term of this government. It is only in this budget that we have seen significant action with the rent-to-build initiative. That is definitely a good initiative, and we on this side support it. However, we are seeing a dramatic reduction in rental affordability across Western Australia.

I turn to utility charges. As I said, there are ministers here who sat around that cabinet table—they have sat there every budget—and, other than a reprieve for one part of one year in the pandemic, every year we have seen a substantial increase of utility charges, particularly when the government came into power. It came in with the old trick of blaming the previous government, then there were massive increases in water and electricity charges and the charges that people cannot escape such as connection fees. Since this government was elected to power, there has been an increase in the cost of energy of around \$400 for the typical household. When I say "typical household", go and have a look at that in the budget. That typical household represents about one in 10 houses in Western Australia. Virtually no household is paying that minimum fee other than some single person living in a house by themselves and does not drive a car. Otherwise, families have seen substantially greater increases in utility charges. We have seen a net total increase in household fees and charges of over \$1 050 a year. In relation to energy—I have pointed this out in an earlier debate and will not repeat it today—the reliability of that electricity is substantially worse than when this government came to power. It is not only more expensive, but also less reliable.

We need the Premier, this government and ministers, as senior people who sit around that cabinet table, to take some meaningful action to reduce those pressures on households in Western Australia. This is real pain. Mums are looking at their kids and saying, "I know your school shoes don't fit; I know you're going through a growing spurt, but I can't buy you those new shoes, because if I do that, I can't pay the mortgage, and if I lose the house, we will not even be able to get rental accommodation." We have a Premier who loves to go out there and strut his stuff and puff out his chest and say what a good job he has done, but that job is not helping the people of Western Australia who are doing it tough. Again, I will point out a characteristic of this government: it loves to announce dollars. In health, we hear, "We've put so many dollars into health. We've put so many dollars into X, Y and Z." But what we do not see is the impact on the ground. We hear about so many dollars going into housing, but we do not see the increase in housing that we need in the state of Western Australia.

We are having such a struggle with food prices. I am sure that the Minister for Transport is aware of the issues in the Wanneroo area and elsewhere where they cannot get pickers. Crops are not being planted because they cannot get pickers because they are not in the state! What happened? What did this government do? When it came into power, one of the first things it did was to remove Western Australia from the regional migration scheme and stop workers coming into the state. Even more so, despite our urging the government during the pandemic, the government took its heavy-handed approach to stopping people and workers coming into the state. Those workers would have built the houses for the people coming into the state who would be there now to pick the crops. Lo and behold, when we need them, we cannot get them to come into the state.

A government member interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is directly at the feet of this government, minister.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Dave Kelly; Ms Emily Hamilton; Mr Shane Love;
Acting Speaker

We support a cautious approach, but not a foolhardy approach of stopping critical workers coming into the state. As has been pointed out, Western Australia has massive inflation, which is really hurting people. Look at the price of vegetables. Consumer price index figures show a 12.7 per cent increase in vegetables. The most basic staple after shelter is food, and it has massive price increases. This government, through its policies, has contributed to that substantial increase.

We have the \$400 rebate. Again, as I have said in this place, and as outlined by the Western Australian Council of Social Service, the government should be delivering more targeted support to people who are really doing it tough. It is imperative that the government freezes household fees and charges. If it did that, it would save each household \$156 right now—this year. The government would save those households that money, and it would cost the state budget \$156 million this year.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [3.44 pm]: I rise to speak on the motion moved by Hon Mia Davies and rebut many of the points that were made today.

First of all, I want to say that this government is acutely aware of the challenges being faced by Western Australians and all Australians. We have seen some unprecedented economic impacts that were not predicted. We always refer back to the start of COVID when we thought that there was going to be a major recession. We thought the mining sector in WA would collapse. We thought that there would be no demand for housing. Economic experts gave briefings and views that COVID was going to basically destroy the national and state economies. Those were the predictions. Therefore, what did the Premier and the cabinet and this government do? It sought to protect the health of Western Australians and the economy of Western Australia. In doing that, we have seen significant economic activity, and we are emerging from this COVID pandemic with a number of economic challenges due to the strong economic activity.

This opposition will never give this Premier and government any credit. The Leader of the Opposition stood up and said that it was “good fortune” that payroll tax and stamp duty increased and that the mining royalties kept increasing. It was not good fortune; it was the outcome of the government’s deliberate decisions. In one breath, a member opposite says, “It’s good fortune that the economy kept going.” In another breath, another one says, “Well, you kept the borders shut!” Those two things actually work together. The reason the economy went well is that we did not have massive lockdowns and COVID running through the community before people were vaccinated—it is as simple as that! Members opposite still will not accept that. The overwhelming view of the WA public and of I think most commentators now is they accept that the approach taken by the WA government protected Western Australian’s health and the economy. The Leader of the Opposition comes in here and says that the economic fortunes of the state were simply good fortune. They were not! It was the outcome of decisions taken, and she still will not accept that. She will not even look up! At least we have the courtesy to look up—honestly! She runs matters of public interest and she does not even have the ability to look up and accept the discussion.

Members opposite then go on to side with all those people who were abusing us for two years. The whole idea that the Premier and the state government should have just sat back and accepted the abuse of the federal government and of New South Wales Premiers—the idea that we would be lectured about gold standard and how other states were the gold standard in managing the pandemic and we should have just sat there—is crazy. We were in no position to be lectured by other states and Premiers. The fact is that members opposite sided with the other states not only for the last two years, but they continue to side with the other states. They go over to Sydney or wherever that little, intimate, conservative climate conference was and they—what?—sit around complaining about WA, egging them on and claiming that no-one wants to come here. That is crazy stuff; it does not actually match reality. If the member for Cottesloe’s son’s friends say they do not want to come to WA, I hope he tells them just how good it is over here. I hope he tells them, “Come on, it’s great over here!” Last week, I had a friend come over from Sydney. She loved it! She said it was great over here. In April, I had friends from Sydney come over as soon as they could. They loved it. We went to Rottnest Island; they do not have anything like that over in New South Wales. We had a great time.

The idea that, somehow, people do not want to come over here is crazy. Yet again, members opposite are siding against Western Australia. If members opposite could have learnt anything over the past two years, it is: do not back other states against Western Australia. But they continue to do that. I am a proud Western Australian and I always have been. The fact that we continue to do well should be a source of pride but members opposite are embarrassed. The Leader of the Opposition started a reconnect tour with her National Party colleagues and friends in the east. She criticises the Deputy Premier for going overseas to promote tourism for overseas workers for the official Reconnect WA package, but creates her own Reconnect WA to connect the National Party.

A government member: What about Barnaby Joyce?

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Barnaby Joyce—sure. Leader of the Opposition, did that reconnect package include Barnaby Joyce? I do not know. She is over there running down the state and backing people who criticise Western Australia.

Let me keep going. On the challenges, this state was the only state to reduce household fees and charges for the representative household. Members opposite say we should freeze household fees and charges but look at page 327 and the estimated impact of this budget on the representative household. The member for Cottesloe said that the representative household had no-one who drove, which is completely wrong. It goes through and tells us about the representative household. It shows there is a reduction in the impact of household fees and charges in the representative household, so we are going further than the opposition requested. It asked for a freeze and we are seeing a reduction of the impact of fees and charges on a representative household. It is driven by the fact that we are giving every electricity user a \$400 discount. That is really significant. The member for Cottesloe said it was not targeted enough, yet the Leader of the Opposition stood up and talked about two working parents who believed they should get more concessions. Does the opposition support the \$400 rebate that will be given to all electricity users or does it not? In the same MPI, the Leader of the Opposition said working families should get discounts and that is why the \$400 discount will go to them, and the Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Cottesloe, said our benefits should be more targeted. On the \$600 credit in 2020, this member for Cottesloe said there was no better example of the government's failure than the waste of the \$600 million Bell settlement. He said the \$600 electricity credit given in 2020 was a disgraceful waste of precious resources. The Leader of the Liberal Party said we should target it and the Leader of the Opposition stood up in the same MPI and talked about two working parents who she believed should be eligible for concessions. They are eligible because the \$400 credit will go to them. Not even in an MPI can the opposition be consistent from one person to the next.

Leader of the Opposition, if I were you, I would not have stood up and asked, "Where's the Premier?" and then got onto a plane to New South Wales for some sort of intimate little conservatives for climate conference, sitting in some little lounge chairs, talking about how good you guys are. I would not have done that. If I was going to go there, I probably would not have done a media commentary saying how bad it is for people to miss Parliament.

A member interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: What I have found out about the members of the opposition is that they are always the victim. I have seen a lot in this place but they are always the victim.

Let me go through the household fees and charges. As I said, a representative household will be getting a reduction in household fees and charges. That is in the budget papers. We are giving every electricity user a \$400 credit. For other areas like public transport, we have introduced a two-zone cap. This means real savings being delivered now—hundreds or thousands of dollars. It is about \$8 each way for people in the member for Dawesville's electorate. These real savings are being delivered now for those in the outer suburbs. That is real and that is happening now. For regional Western Australians, we have guaranteed airfare prices. That is something members opposite could never deliver in eight and a half years, but we have introduced it. From 1 July, there will be a two-zone cap, in a sense, for regional airfares. I will keep going through all the other significant savings but also price caps for CPI.

Another point I want to make is about our unemployment rate. Employment in Western Australia is as strong as it has ever been. The participation rate is the strongest in the nation. That means more Western Australians are in work. I fundamentally believe that giving people jobs is one the best ways to help handle the cost-of-living pressures. We understand the cost-of-living pressures and there are a number of reasons that they are happening. As I said, we are coming through a global pandemic the likes of which we have never seen. There have been labour issues and labour shortages but do members know what? If we had let all those people come in, as the opposition wanted, the mining sector would probably have had to shut down because COVID would have been rampant through the mining sector. Then we would not have had the royalties and we would probably be in deficit as a result of what the opposition wanted. Members opposite wanted the "let it rip" strategy, which would have cost the economy, the health and the finances of Western Australians.

In housing, we understand there are massive challenges. A couple of years ago we were expecting there would be unemployed bricklayers and tilers around the place, but there was not. Instead, the state and federal governments worked to create stimulus packages for new house and land packages and that has worked with record numbers of approvals and numbers of buildings throughout the state. That volume will continue to come online. On apartments and multi-unit dwellings, the Leader of the Liberal Party now somehow supports those. This is the Liberal Party that opposed nearly every high-density development ever discussed. It wants councils to be able to delay and block proposals forever. The Liberal Party wants councils to be able to reject multi-unit dwellings. It does not like processes like the state development assessment unit, which allows decision-making through the Western Australian Planning Commission, to have some flexibility to the tune of 20 centimetres for a building because it is in Cottesloe. It does not like that. It has opposed every proposal to bring in more apartments and multi-unit dwellings. How can the Leader of the Liberal Party stand up and ask, "What are you doing in housing?" when he has blocked everything that brings housing? He does not like the fact that there might be apartments in the vicinity of a school. He believes everyone who lives in apartments are bad people who should not be living in close proximity to the community. That is what his approach has been. As the Minister for Housing has reiterated a number of times, there is record

investment in social housing, including looking at modular builds and different forms of buildings to get more property onto the market. We have the house and land package stimulus, the housing diversity pipeline and a range of concessions, including build to rent. It is funny the Liberal Party supports build to rent but does not support other people building to rent their homes. It supports super funds building to rent, but not anyone else building homes for rent. There is a range of initiatives across the state to support new housing infrastructure but, of course, there are challenges. We have seen escalation. Ukraine and Russia have impacted our gas, oil and other prices, which impacts fuel prices. All these things have been challenging to work with but, if members look around the world, where would people rather be? They would rather be in Western Australia. Another point I want to make is that, as members opposite continue to run down the state, of course housing affordability is still much better here than in other states. Members opposite cannot deny that fact.

As I said, we do not have toll roads in Western Australia. I will go through what we have in Armadale, a suburb 30 to 40 kilometres from the city. We have an Autoload fare of \$4. In Blacktown, a similar suburb in New South Wales, the fare is \$5.23. What tolls are there from Armadale to Perth—zero; from Blacktown to Sydney, they are \$18. They have tolls everywhere. The New South Wales government has just announced \$520 million to subsidise low-income earners to pay the tolls that it introduced! We do not have tolls. Our budget is in a better position because we did not privatise every asset. We are actually in control of our monopoly infrastructure, apart from the Westrail freight rail line, which the previous Liberal–National government privatised. We are in control of our infrastructure and we are able to manage costs. We should get some recognition for that. Let us talk about energy costs. What is happening in New South Wales? We introduced the domestic gas reservation policy. I worked for the then Premier, Alan Carpenter, in 2006 when he did that. People called him Hugo Chávez! People called him a lot of things at the time, arguing it was too interventionist. Now, all people are saying is, “Why didn’t we do that?” We have outlined that we are doing all we can to keep pressure off families. We introduced a \$400 energy credit, which is on top of the \$600 credit handed down in 2020. There has been a decrease in costs based on a representative household. We are working on other key issues such as public transport fares, with a two-zone cap, and airfares; and we continue to make sure we are building houses at a rate that we can deliver. We continue to do all we can to support people across the state; in particular, I note the work that the Minister for Disability Services has done with the incoming federal government on the Activ Foundation. Members will remember that we had a Western Australian federal Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Does anyone remember her? Linda Reynolds—I remember her. What did she do? Nothing! She disappeared.

A government member: She tried to reduce the amount available.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Yes. She disappeared. Her comment was, “That’s it. I’m out of here.” She wiped her hands of it; she did not care at all. We will continue to work with the WA community to address the challenges. We will not insult WA. We will not back other Premiers, in particular the New South Wales Premier criticising WA. We will not do that. At the last federal election, Western Australians wanted a government that would stand up for them, whether it is on the issues they care about or to defend against the criticism and attacks we took. Members opposite have sat there and criticised and undermined this government. Today they again demonstrated that they have learnt nothing. WA’s economic and financial situation is because of the work this government put in. The GST deal is there because we won the 2017 election. If members opposite had won that election, there would not have been a GST deal—full stop! We are now getting a better share in our infrastructure spend. They stand there and say WA’s economic situation is because of good fortune and that the government should have let it rip—let workers come in and COVID be everywhere! It is completely false to claim that would have worked out.

Members opposite have demonstrated they have learnt nothing. Honestly, the idea that they would be over east, applauding people criticising Western Australia makes me sick, especially when they walked out of this Parliament after criticising people for not being here and then catching a plane and attending a conference that they probably did not need to be at. But, as I said, that is up to them and if they want to talk about those issues, that is fine, but do not criticise people who are down in the community faced with a very challenging situation. Why do we do that? Why do we make those tough decisions? We want to make sure we can control our energy prices—not today, not until the next election, but for the next 10 to 15 years. That is why it was a responsible decision to make and to have the Premier and Minister for Energy in Collie last Tuesday.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water) [4.04 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to this debate. Members on this side of the house understand that some people find it difficult to make ends meet. Before I came to this place, I spent 20 years representing a lot of people in this state who find it difficult to make ends meet—cleaners, security guards, hospitality workers, aged-care workers and the people who look after our schools and our hospitals. They are the people who members on this side of the house have always represented. Members opposite come in here today to try to paint themselves as a party and an opposition that actually cares about those people. Quite frankly, we just do not believe them, because their record over years shows that they do not. I will tell one story of when I represented those workers. We negotiated with a previous Labor government, the Carpenter government,

for an increase in the hourly rate of cleaners who clean government buildings. They were employed by contractors but they cleaned government buildings. In 2008, we got the Carpenter government to announce that it would put minimum rates of pay in those cleaning contracts so that cleaners who clean government buildings would get the same pay as a cleaner in a government school. The Carpenter government announced that increase. Then we had the 2008 election and the Liberal and National Parties won. One of the first decisions that Troy Buswell made as Treasurer was to cancel that pay rise. He cancelled that pay rise! Mrs Flowers was one of the workers who argued for that pay rise. She told me the difference that pay rise would have made. She worked two jobs. She cleaned a building in the morning and another in the afternoon for one company, and in the middle of the day she cleaned a third building. She said that pay rise would have allowed her to get rid of that second job in the middle of the day and she would have been able to spend the day with her grandchildren. That was how important that pay rise was to her. The Liberal–National government cancelled it. It did not put out a press release; it just cancelled it! Members opposite come in here and say that as an alliance they care about those sorts of people. The history of what they have done, not over the last week but over decades, is that they just do not care.

I will refer to some of the points members opposite made today. The leader of the alliance raised a whole bunch of issues. She hardly mentioned water at all. I think there was one mention in her speech. When she gets up in this house, she rarely mentions water charges because she knows that when she was the Minister for Water, under her leadership, water prices skyrocketed. Let us look at the last Liberal–National government. It put water prices up by 10.8 per cent in 2011, then 8.5 per cent, 6.8 per cent, six per cent, 5.2 per cent, 4.5 per cent and 4.5 per cent, for a total of 66.8 per cent when she was in government. The budget the former government left us had water prices going up six per cent each year across the forward estimates. What has our record been? It was six per cent in the first year with the budget we inherited, then 5.2 per cent, 2.5 per cent, and minus 1.3 per cent in 2021—we actually reduced water prices—for a total of 15.1 per cent. In the first five years of the last Liberal–National government, there was a 45.2 per cent increase in water charges. In the first five years of the McGowan government, it was 15.1 per cent. That is a stark difference. On top of that, the former minister was cutting off the service to 2 500 families; she reduced their water to a trickle because they could not pay their bills. That was 2 500 families a year. Through basic hardship measures and asking the Water Corporation to be proactive and not punitive, we have reduced that number. Before COVID, we got the number down to 700 or 800 a year. That is our record in government. Members opposite come in here saying they care about those people in the community who are struggling to pay their bills, but when they get on to the Treasury bench, they are a completely different animal. They show that, in fact, they just do not care.

I will make another point before I sit down. One of the issues that the Leader of the Liberal Party made about the rebate on electricity charges was that he did not support it because it is not targeted. He said today that Nigel Satterley does not need a credit so why should he get it, yet the opposition's motion is to freeze all charges. If we accept the member's advice and freeze all charges, we would be freezing the charges of Nigel Satterley because everybody will get their fees and charges frozen regardless of their income. The member cannot even be consistent in the one debate; do not give people an electricity credit because it is not targeted and Nigel Satterley will get it, but we should freeze all charges so Nigel will get his charges frozen. It just does not make sense. The member does not do the work. The Leader of the Opposition came in here and said we should freeze all government charges but cannot tell us how much that would cost.

A member interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: No, she did not. She could not tell us. That is the level of detail that members opposite bring to this debate.

Acting Speaker, members opposite have no credibility on this issue. On this side of the house, we understand the difficulties that families face and sometimes experience. We take practical measures, and we always will, because we will always be the party that defends those households.

Amendment to Motion

Mr D.J. KELLY: I move —

That all words after “house” be deleted and the following be inserted —

acknowledges that the previous Liberal–National government, including its former Minister for Water, the member for Central Wheatbelt, never froze household fees and charges or capped them at inflation, and that the only government that has reduced fees and charges in the past 15 years is the McGowan Labor government

MS E.L. HAMILTON (Joondalup) [4.11 pm]: I rise to make a contribution to this debate. To be clear, it is always a Labor government that supports the easing of household cost-of-living pressures. This government has done more to support Western Australian households than any other government of the past 15 years.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Dave Kelly; Ms Emily Hamilton; Mr Shane Love;
Acting Speaker

I will just take a moment to reflect on the eight and a half years that the previous Liberal–National government was in office. Times were tough for people who were living in Joondalup, in those outer suburbs of Perth. Household fees and charges went up \$2 100 under the previous Liberal–National government and not once during its time in office did that government freeze power prices. In fact, in 2009 they increased by about 25.6 per cent and again in 2010 by just over 15 per cent. If we look at the whole host of other charges that increased under the former government’s leadership, we see the charges the Minister for Water touched on—sewerage and drainage charges were up 66 per cent. The hardship utility grant scheme to assist customers who need support due to hardship was slashed and access to financial counsellors was cut, closing the door to vulnerable individuals who needed support but were not able to get it. That was something I was aware of in Joondalup. Also, as we talk about the challenges of housing affordability, we should note that under the previous Liberal–National government, the first home owner grant for established houses was cut, as was stamp duty concessions for first home owners. I represent an electorate with 25 per cent of residents under 25 years of age and I know this issue was deeply felt, particularly as a lot of young people strive to be home owners. I think it is disingenuous for members on the other side of the chamber to criticise the state government’s efforts so far in supporting households.

I reflect again on some of the fees and charges that were increased under the Barnett government. Land tax increased not once, not twice, but three times. That affects small business operations particularly, and those in the northern corridor were hit hard. Joondalup represents around 14 000 small businesses, all of which had this additional cost. If we look at the efforts made by our state government, definitely, to address the challenges for families, importantly, an issue I talk to a lot is the benefit of the caps on public transport fares.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is that the words to be deleted be deleted.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: Point of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Is it a point of order about the question I have just put?

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes. It is a point of order about the amendment to the motion we are about to vote on.

The ACTING SPEAKER: All right, I will hear the point of order, but if it is not a point of order, I may call you to order, Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to inquire whether the words “you need to move this at the end of your remarks —

The ACTING SPEAKER: No! Deputy Leader of the Opposition, sit down. I made my position very clear prior to you pulling that stunt. The amendment to the motion was moved by the Minister for Water. That was the amendment that was moved and the motion that will be put. You do not get to read in extra material as it suits you. That is not a point of order and I call you to order for the first time.

Debate Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is that the words to be deleted be deleted.