

IRON ORE ROYALTIES

Motion

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [1.09 pm]: With great delight, I move —

That this house notes —

- (a) the correction of the iron ore prices over the last year;
- (b) the impending correction of iron ore royalties to be received by the government;
- (c) the failure of the government to use the massive incomes it received in the 2019–22 boom to improve the services delivered to the Western Australian community; and
- (d) the widespread crises being experienced by people at the end of the biggest fiscal boom in this state's history.

President, thank you for giving me the opportunity to give a quick review of the performance of the government and the economy over the last little bit. I noted that I managed to describe myself as an optimist in the media this week, and I think that is absolutely the case. I have been optimistic that this government would improve its performance over the Christmas break. I am optimistic that this government might actually get things on the up and up. I am an optimist, but I have been let down by the Labor government again. I have been let down by the standard of performance and the way this government uses its massive windfalls. Not only does it have an embarrassment of riches —

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Bring the temperature down a little bit please, members.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you for your protection, President.

Not only does this government have an embarrassment of riches with the windfall it gained as a result of the latest boom, but it is an embarrassment at a greater level when we look at the performance of the government and how it has used those riches. This government is embarrassed by its performance, and rightly so.

When I wrote this motion towards the end of last year, there were a couple of issues that we were probably not aware of, and there have been some updates since we hit the great year of 2023. The first part of the motion refers to the correction of the iron ore price over the last year. Let us look at what happened from late November to the current day. There was a correction. A year ago, the iron ore price was \$US146 a tonne. After I wrote this motion, the price declined to around \$US109 to \$US110 in December. What is it today? The price of iron ore today is \$US124 a tonne. Yes, it did correct a bit, but guess what? It is creeping back up again. We are seeing an improvement in the government's fiscal position, but not because of any good financial management by the McGowan government and not because the McGowan government has done anything to deserve it. It is simply because the iron ore price has crept back up again.

I have already mentioned in this house this simple piece of mathematics. During the peak of the boom, the iron ore royalty revenue to this state went up \$6 billion, and this government had a budget surplus of \$6 billion. It is pretty simple mathematics; there is a direct correlation between the two. Was this great economic management? This government came into office and inherited a \$32 billion net government debt. In its first budget, it predicted it would go up to between \$42 billion and \$44 billion. The government predicted an increase in government debt because it did not have good financial management. What happened? The iron ore price boomed. When the iron ore price boomed, the government had a lot more money.

What has happened more recently? Before I get to the more general failures of this government, let us look at the economic situation that we have right now. The current iron ore price is about \$US124 a tonne. The higher iron ore price was recognised in the government's *Government mid-year financial projections statement*. That is obviously a very good document. It comes out in the middle of December. It was good to see that it showed a bit of reality. The government's midyear review raised the predicted price of iron ore from \$US77.50 in the May budget to \$US87.40 in the midyear review. We should bear in mind that when the government did that, the price of iron ore was \$US109 a tonne and today it is \$US124 a tonne. What has the government done? It has had increased iron ore royalty revenue again. There is an error in this motion. It was written with good intent back in 2022—all that time ago—because it describes the 2019–22 economic mining boom. In fact, if we amended it, it should refer to the 2019–23 mining boom because it is still occurring.

How has the McGowan government responded to this increasingly embarrassing wealth that it has to try to do something with? It has tried to fudge the budget again. What happened in the midyear review? What little financial manipulation did we see? After all these years, the Premier; Treasurer is finally embarrassed by the amount of

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wealth that he has in his money bin. There is no more room for him to roll around like Scrooge McDuck. He cannot do it. There is not enough room in there. He has to try to move it. He is embarrassed by his wealth. What has he done with it? Guess what? He is artificially keeping the 2022–23 budget surplus down. How is he doing that? Guess what he has done again? Not for the first time when he was rich, he asked the government trading enterprises to withhold their dividends that would normally be a part of government revenue. If we look at the budget that came out last year, guess what? There is revenue that should be applied from government trading enterprises into the state coffers. What was it set at? It was set at about \$1.4 billion. That is a nice little earner. Most of it came from the Water Corporation, but the government is doing pretty well, thank you very much.

What does the midyear review say? Nothing. There is no dividend coming. A total of \$1.4 billion is ultimately being kept in the government's bank accounts but just hidden from the consolidated account so it does not go into the budget as revenue. What does that mean? That means that the government gets to artificially deflate its surplus coming up. What did it say in the midyear review? It said, "We thought it would be a \$1.7 billion surplus. It is a couple of hundred million dollars higher than that. It might be nearly \$2 billion."

Why is the government doing that? It is doing that because it is embarrassed by the riches that it cannot spend for the benefit of the people of Western Australia. What has the government done to hide that money? It has taken \$1.4 billion out of that surplus and said, "We're a bit poorer than we said we were going to be. We won't have as much money. We'll just keep that in the bank accounts of the Water Corp and other government trading enterprises." The government's \$2 billion surplus is actually a \$3.4 billion surplus, and it is still rising because the iron ore price is still \$US124 a tonne today, not the \$US87.40 that it said it would be in the midyear review.

State taxes are still on the rise. The government pulled in \$1 billion more in state taxes than it predicted. The government is still bringing in wealth, taking it out of the pockets of the people of Western Australia, sticking it in the money bin and hiding the fact that it is doing so.

Under normal circumstances, when we have this sort of wealth rolling in—this amount of money—we would think that the services provided to the people of Western Australia would be topnotch. We would think that the government would be providing a greater level of service during the biggest economic boom we have ever had than any preceding government.

Hon Kyle McGinn: Under the pandemic, by the way.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I like that. The government's defence —

Hon Kyle McGinn: It did happen, right?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It absolutely did happen. The member is certainly right. As I have said, Hon Kyle McGinn, I think the government did a pretty reasonable job doing the pandemic. It implemented the health advice. Well done, people. You took the advice.

Hon Kyle McGinn: I wonder how the resources sector would have gone if it had been shut.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Hon Kyle McGinn, you cannot blame the mismanagement of the economy of this state and the government's fiscal mismanagement on the pandemic forever. Guess what? The government cannot blame it on the pandemic forever. At some point, it has to have a valid assessment of its performance outside of the pandemic.

Hon Kyle McGinn: Not a sign on the front bench there.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It only takes one of me to keep you guys under control. That is fine.

The government cannot blame the pandemic forever; it has to start performing. What has been done particularly well by this state government outside of the pandemic? What shall we look at to see how we measure the performance of this government? As I keep saying, this Premier's legacy will be judged on the government's performance in the greatest boom in this state's history, not on the pandemic. I understand that the Labor Party would like it to be purely on the pandemic, for that to never change and to see us bogged down in history so that it is all we can talk about. However, the government actually needs to be assessed on what it did.

I have an interesting small anecdote, President. I saw a press release from the Minister for Housing this week saying how great it is that the government has built 1 000 social houses. It is fantastic, isn't that great? Well, well done. How many have they taken out of the system, Hon Steve Martin?

Hon Steve Martin interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They have actually taken more houses out. It is a lovely bit of spin. They have taken more houses out of the marketplace than they have actually put in. Well done! The Labor government has shifted

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a bit in the right direction. There are more houses than it had a year ago. There are not as many as when it came into power, but there are more houses than there were a year ago.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are looking for a pat on the back for that, President. I thought that was really interesting.

It has not particularly improved its performance there, but again, I am an optimist. I live in hope that one day it will get better. If it continues down this path, it might catch up and end up with as many houses as it inherited when it got here. Let us see. This is the issue that we face. This gold-standard transparency that we were promised looks a bit like coal-standard transparency instead, does it not? We will get to that in a minute. It is amazing to think that in terms of transparency—Hon Kyle McGinn will love this, as a good union man—we are importing coal to Collie from Newcastle. That is a great performance on behalf of the state government—importing coal!

Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Hang on, they do not like that, President.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can we please keep some order to ensure that Hansard has the opportunity to capture the full flavour of the debate.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, President. I have been stimulated to discuss energy policy, which I think is fantastic. The sooner I talk about energy policy —

Hon Kate Doust: You were very embarrassed about your own party's policy on energy.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: My comments on the previous policy are well publicised. Hon Kate Doust can quote me from the newspaper on that one. Let me guarantee, as the shadow Minister for Energy, that that policy is dead. I have turned off the life-support system and it is utterly dead. Let us move on.

Once again the Labor Party is living in the past. In the greatest boom in our history, this government is panicking about how to keep the lights on. That is the simplest and most obvious thing that can be seen in the most recent debacle that this government has presided over. It is desperate. Now, I have enormous respect for the Minister for Energy. I think he does understand the energy system in this state. I think the Premier has told him, "Keep the lights on, no matter what you do, because we are embarrassed about where we have got to". If there was a reasonable heatwave in the state of Western Australia at the moment, there is every probability that the state system would fail and the energy would be down, if not off. That is because this state cannot provide baseload power to its people.

What has its response been? Let us just look at the performance—at that gold-standard transparency that we were promised. We have finally got the number. How much money did this government tip into a foreign-owned coal company that owes \$1.4 billion and has zero capacity to pay it back? We asked when it was announced in December last year. Guess what we were told? We were told it was commercial in confidence. "By the way," said the minister announcing it, as currently run by the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade, "We will get the money back off a company that owes \$1.4 billion, don't worry!" Luckily for him, the next day the Premier went out and said "Well, actually, the opposition has called us out on this. They said we are living in dreamland, thinking we are going to get money back out of a company that owes that sort of money".

Hon Kyle McGinn: Is that what he said?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is what he said. Hon Kyle McGinn needs to read between the lines. He said, "The opposition has embarrassed us again. We have been caught out by the opposition again on misleading the community." He said there was no chance. In fact, not only did he say that there is no chance of us actually getting this paid back, it is likely we would have to make further payments.

On day one, 22 December, the government said they were putting money in, but could not tell us how much, because it is secret. It stated it would get it back. The next day it said it could not tell us how much it is, but we would not get it back and would probably have to pay more. I had a question yesterday in question time. The first one was "How much was it?" I lodged it yesterday. I do note that finally, the Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade in the lower house admitted and fessed up to the amount of the payment yesterday in a statement in the other place. It was \$19.5 million dollars. As the Premier himself said, that payment probably will not be the last one.

That is gold-standard transparency! The government said, "We'll get it back. No, we won't. Yes, we will. We can't tell you how much, since it's commercial-in-confidence." Hang on a minute, when the opposition asked a question in Parliament, suddenly it could tell us. That is fantastic. I know members opposite are very interested in the importation of coal to Collie. It is another desperate attempt to keep the lights on by the government of Western Australia. Again, I have some sympathy.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

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Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We have moved from iron ore to coal. The member has to keep up.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Hon Dan Caddy, here is the difference: we are exporting iron ore and importing coal to Collie, the coal mining hub of Western Australia. Now, it is only 100 000 tonnes. It takes a very special government to get to the point that it is importing coal to Collie. Do not worry about taking coal to Newcastle! We are taking coal from Newcastle to Collie. I struggle to believe that a government of any persuasion—the Labor Party or ours—will ever do something as farcical as that again. I struggle to believe it. The government is importing coal to Collie and blending it with local coal. There is an issue with the quality of coal, both the Collie coal and the coal that is coming across. The Collie coal is lower in ash, but lower in energy. The imported coal is far higher in ash, but higher in energy. The blending process is a bit tricky.

We asked about that yesterday. We asked a really simple question: What is the cost of importing coal to Collie? How much has this government put in? The international price is \$400 a tonne and the domestic price here is between \$40 to \$50 a tonne. That is a pretty big difference. It would be nice to know what the taxpayers of this state are paying through subsidies into Synergy for it to demand the importation of 100 000 tonnes of coal from Newcastle into Collie. What was the answer yesterday? It was, “It is commercial-in-confidence.” That is gold-standard transparency! The government could not tell us how much it costs to transport 100 000 tonnes of coal from the coal mining hub of Newcastle to the coal mining hub of Collie. It could not tell us that, apparently because it is a competitive market.

That got me thinking, and I will be looking forward to the minister’s response. If the government is worried about further negotiations around importing coal into Collie, what does that say? It says to me that the government cannot tell us the cost of getting coal into Collie because it is going to have to buy some more. It still cannot keep the lights on. It has got 100 000 tonnes and that is not going to be enough. Otherwise, why would they have to keep it secret? If this was a one-off during a difficult time, okay, fair enough. The government has said that there are all sorts of issues—I can talk for a couple of hours about the economics of taking coal out of Collie, the companies and the struggles they have—no problem. I do not even mind. The government effectively put \$20 million into the Griffin Coal mining company. It will never be able to pay it back, but it probably cannot get coal out of the ground without it. Its circumstances are dire. Some of the machinery is on death’s door. I get it.

The government should simply be honest and say, “You know what? Our plan for energy isn’t working. We actually have to prop up a company that we will never get the money back from.” The state of the machinery in that privately owned—sort of—coal company is not the fault of the government. There you go—I told the government I was an optimist. That is not the government’s fault, but how it manages it and deals with it absolutely is. The mere fact that the government cannot tell us what it cost to import 100 000 tonnes of coal from Newcastle to Collie, because it might have to go back into the marketplace and buy some more, is a diabolical embarrassment. That is what is going on. I have enormous sympathy for the government and the minister, because I think they have got a difficult job. However, a bit of open and honest accountability would be a great thing —

Hon Kate Doust: Yes. We used to have to deal with that all the time from your ministers.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is gold-standard transparency! We are going to run out of time. I have great respect for the member, but I do not have time for the history. I am trying to work up to the present day. Where are we right now? We have a system in crisis. The government’s plan for that system will make it worse, not better. It cannot tell us how much it cost and it cannot explain to the people of Western Australia where its money is going.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services) [1.29 pm]: I am absolutely ready to go. It was remiss of me, President, not to acknowledge the recent election of Hon Dr Steve Thomas as the new Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party and of course Hon Tjorn Sibma as the new Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in this place. I want to put that on the record today.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: He already was.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There you go. It is in a list now, so it is finally acknowledged. We knew he had leadership potential, but he is finally proud enough to put it into a statement. It is also good to see Hon Donna Faragher back on those front benches. The A team of the Liberal Party is in the chamber today!

I am reminded that yesterday, the Premier in the other place gave his Premier’s Statement and in it he acknowledged the great work of Western Australians over the past few years, particularly last year, in relation to the strong position that we find ourselves in today. He acknowledged every Western Australian, and I have to disagree with him, because every Western Australian should be acknowledged except for the Liberal Party, because it is yet again being shameful and outrageous. It is forgetting the past and how its government left Western Australia. It is forgetting the damage it caused to Western Australia in its years of power in this place. But I will remind honourable members

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today. We will not forget what the Liberal Party did when it was on the Treasury bench, just because it is trying to today.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: It might be a surprise to the honourable member, but we will not be supporting this motion. As I said to the honourable member in another place earlier today, he is one of the best recyclers in this place. Do members know why? It is because he recycles this motion time and again like a broken record. He tries to varnish over the years that the Liberal Party had in government and the economic mess it left us in, and tries to somehow blame us, as if it is a bad thing, for not only how Western Australia has done during the COVID crisis, but also how this government has managed the budget, kept this state strong and kept people alive over the past years. He forgets that. Again, I will not let members forget that.

First of all, let me talk about the iron ore price. The iron ore price is and continues to be volatile. I think the member would agree with that. It goes up and down, and is dependent on our client countries around the world.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: It has been resilient for the last year.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: The member has acknowledged, because I think he has said it in this place previously, the volatility of it and the fact that the state is reliant on other countries and their economies. It is extremely volatile, and we are the only state that faces that volatility because we are the only state that has such a high, I would not say reliance, but certainly, iron ore plays a big part of our budget. That is why the budget continues to incorporate cautious iron ore assumptions. The budget does not lock in expenditure based on unsustainably high prices. We are happy to pride ourselves on that. If we look at assumptions made in the federal budget, not just the current government or indeed the last one, the assumptions are generally around the same.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: The feds have been lower.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes. There is a tiny bit of difference, but they are generally the same. As we have said time and again, the McGowan government has learned from the mistakes of those on the other side of the chamber. We sat there and faced them all for the years that they were in government, and we knew what they were doing was wrong because they banked in very high expenditure growth based on overly optimistic iron ore prices and essentially left us with a massive hangover, because we had to pay back their massive debt.

As we know, and as I have said in this place before, the recklessness of the previous Liberal–National government placed debt levels on a path to about \$44 billion by 2019–20. The 2022–23 midyear review delivered in December included the revised iron ore price assumption for 2022–23 of \$US87.40 a tonne. That is significantly lower than the average of \$US138.2 a tonne in 2021–22. Previously, prices fell by more than 50 per cent from early April 2022 to late October 2022. That reflected weaker steel demand in China, and, as I said, we are reliant in our price on other countries. Activity was constrained by frequent COVID-19 lockdowns and an ongoing downturn in the property sector in that country at the time. Iron ore prices have rebounded now to around \$US120 a tonne following China's abrupt move away from its zero-COVID policy in late 2022, which boosted market sentiment and prices. However, market fundamentals remain subdued and China's crude steel production fell by 2.1 per cent in 2022 following a 3.2 per cent decline in 2021. High inflation rates, energy prices and interest rates were particularly significant in dampening global demand for steel. Assumptions remain unchanged at \$US66 a tonne across the remainder of the forward estimates, which are based on the long-run average price. As an indicator, the commonwealth has a similar approach to rapidly reverting to a long-run price assumption, with a similar price forecast expressed in free onboard terms, which excludes the cost of freight. Although iron ore prices rebounding since early November presents some upside risk to the 2022–23 midyear review and the revenue forecast, the change since October shows just how volatile the market is. It is important that we remember that. The expected weakening in the global economy, rising interest rates and inflation is expected to impact on not only our state's economy, but also our finances.

One element of the motion before us today talks about crises being experienced by people at the end of the state's biggest financial boom. In the contribution it was suggested that we have not been spending the money and we have not been spending it in the right areas. I disagree with the shadow Treasurer and his assertion that this government is not spending enough to improve services and support WA households. That is simply untrue, because the proof is in the pudding. Unlike the Liberals and Nationals, we have made sure that we do not spend beyond our means and rack up massive operating debts and deficits. It is interesting that since taking office, the new Leader of the Liberal Party in the other place has already made about \$3 billion in spending commitments. That has been, what, two weeks? It is back to the future; back to when it was on the Treasury bench last time. It is back to bust, I heard somebody say, because it spent like drunken sailors last time it was in government. Even though it is not on this side yet, it has already been dishing out the dollars. I guess there is more of that to come.

We continue to use our strong financial position responsibly. We are addressing the challenges that Western Australians are facing today and we are trying to set the state up for the future. This includes our massive spending on health,

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on cost-of-living relief, improving public sector pay and conditions, and addressing climate change. I will come back to that in a second and I might touch on Collie, because the honourable member hit a raw nerve about Collie and what the Liberal Party tried to do to Collie. It was outrageous. We have been addressing climate change. We are invested in social housing. We are investing in remote communities and more. Prior to COVID-19, this government had some significant decisions to make to fix the budget and to get expenditure growth under control. WA's improved financial position provided the capacity to implement an unprecedented response to the pandemic. We are very proud of that because we not only kept people alive, we also kept the economy going, kept people in jobs and kept people safe. We are incredibly proud about that. However, it is important to remember that despite unprecedented spending in response to the pandemic and record investment in infrastructure and services, Treasury boffins both nationally and locally, and indeed around the world, thought the economy was going to nosedive. They thought that many people would be out of jobs very quickly so government made a decision to keep the economy ticking over with a massive investment in infrastructure and services. Even with unprecedented spending as a result of the pandemic, our debt levels declined for a consecutive third year in 2021–22—again, something of which we are incredibly proud. That is in stark contrast to the rapidly growing net debt trajectories of the commonwealth and the other states. That is true. Net debt is expected to double in New South Wales to over \$150 billion and more than double in Victoria to over \$140 billion in their respective budget periods.

What have we done at the same time? As I said, we have invested additionally in services and infrastructure. We invested over an additional \$6 billion into the health and mental health system to help Western Australians and ensure that they stayed alive and that they got quality services. That included new initiatives to improve patient flow in emergency departments; a boost for funding for health and medical research; and a boost to deal with ICT and cybersecurity issues, which is a growing challenge in not only Western Australia and Australia but around the world as we see foreign actors try to take over agency databases and access the data of ordinary Western Australians. We have seen more money for regional hospitals. More money has been spent on emergency department reforms. Our health workforce grew by about 8 000 FTE between the March quarter in 2017 and September 2022. That is about a 25 per cent increase or just over four per cent per annum during that time. This compares to a smaller growth over the eight and a half years of the previous Liberal–National government. We are delivering the equivalent of a new tertiary hospital by adding hundreds of new beds to our health system in Western Australia. Over the next four years, major hospital redevelopments and expansions will happen, including the Geraldton Health Campus.

Hon Steve Martin: Geraldton?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely. I am sure the member would have seen the announcement. I am sure he is very proud of the announcement, as are our Agricultural Region representatives in this place.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hansard has a difficult enough task as it is, so if you want your contribution to be recorded, I suggest you do it in a clear fashion in your correct time. The deputy leader has the call.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thanks, President. Indeed, I do have the call, and I was saying that members would have noticed the announcement made last week in Geraldton for a further boost to the Geraldton hospital. I want to credit Lara Dalton, the member for Geraldton, and also our hardworking Agricultural Region representatives, Hon Darren West, Hon Shelley Payne and Hon Sandra Carr, who have worked incredibly hard and who continue to work incredibly hard for that region. It is not only Geraldton hospital that the government is making an investment in, but also Joondalup Health Campus, Fremantle Hospital, Bunbury Regional Hospital, Peel Health Campus, Laverton Hospital, Tom Price Hospital, Newman Health Service and Meekatharra Hospital. All that money is in the budget. All that money is in the forward estimates and we are incredibly proud of that. Of course, that is on top of the \$1.6 billion that has been set aside for the new women's and babies' hospital. It is a pity Hon Donna Faragher is away from the chamber on urgent parliamentary business because I know her commitment to women's and babies' issues and I know that she will be a supporter of this significant investment into this new facility that all Western Australians will benefit from.

That is health. Significant investments have been made also in education and training, such as the TAFE Lower Fees, Local Skills program. It is important to remember that a previous Liberal Party minister for training in the other place got rid of many TAFE courses and jacked up fees and put TAFE out of reach for many Western Australians. However, we have overturned that; many TAFE courses are now free or require only a small payment, and that is boosting the sector.

The government is building more primary schools across the state. It is boosting workforce participation and training for industries such as defence, construction and space—industries that will take us on a new trajectory and that will put us in a world-leading space. The government is spending more on supporting strong communities with an investment into boosting child protection services with more frontline workers, early intervention programs and

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the Target 120 program. We are providing more money for more support for people with disabilities and a boost for family and domestic violence initiatives. The government put \$350 million aside in the budget to establish a new remote communities fund to ensure that people in remote communities get access to upgraded water and electricity services and also housing in remote Aboriginal communities. The government is seeking a matching contribution from the commonwealth government for that.

There is more money for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas interjected.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: You had your go. You can come back later and ask a question, but you are not having a go during my time.

Those who represent the Agricultural Region in this state know how important the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development is and that the facility it has worked out of for the past however many years has been suboptimal. This is a significant investment for that department that will deliver for Western Australians, including regional Western Australians.

There is more money in the budget for youth justice initiatives in the Kimberley, more money for housing and more money for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. As I indicated previously, we are also making a significant investment into infrastructure in this state. Over the next four years the government will invest a record \$35 billion in our asset investment program. That will provide a pipeline of infrastructure to benefit all Western Australians regardless of where they are. Whether they are in the bush or the city, there will be benefits for the community. This amount includes a record \$12 billion for infrastructure in regional Western Australia and that, too, will be a game changer. The government is also spending more money on transport and on desalination. We have money in the budget for an Aboriginal cultural centre. The list goes on and on. I have not mentioned transport but, of course, 13 projects are underway, including the Morley–Ellenbrook line, the Thornlie–Cockburn Link, the Yanchep rail extension, the new Bayswater station, the new Lakelands station, the new Midland station, the Victoria Park–Canning level crossing removal, the Byford rail extension, a high-capacity signalling project, and a public transport operations centre. These projects are not just one-off jobs during the construction process; they will lead to ongoing jobs for Western Australians.

I must touch now on easing the cost of living for Western Australia because that is a high priority for this government. Fortunately, we kept our electricity providers in public hands. That is why we are not subject to the massive increases in electricity prices that were experienced on the east coast of Australia. As we know, if it were up to those on the other side of the chamber, they would have sold off our electricity corporations; they would have privatised them.

Hon Kyle McGinn: They still want to.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Absolutely; they would have privatised them and Western Australians would be facing the massive increases that people on the east coast have faced.

Because of this state's strong financial position, we were able to deliver a household electricity credit to every WA household.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Members, lower the cross-chamber chatter. I give the deputy leader the call.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Thank you, President. I note that I have lost six seconds during that time, so I would ask that members do not interject in my last minute and a half.

That \$400 electricity credit to every WA household in the second half of last year put around \$445 million back into the pockets of Western Australians, on top of the \$600 that we previously provided to them. That is \$1 000 of electricity rate relief in less than two years. We are also providing support to those who need it most with an energy assistance payment. Combined with the \$400 credit, that payment will provide some WA households with cost-of-living relief of more than \$710 this financial year.

We have gone above and beyond our commitment at the last election to limit increases in electricity, water and public transport fees to inflation. I could say so much more today. We are proud of the role that we have played in government for the past six years. We have righted the wrongs of the members on the far side of the chamber who left us with massive debt. We have helped ordinary Western Australians. We kept them alive through the pandemic. We will continue to listen to and work for Western Australians for as long as they keep us on this side of the chamber and in government. We are grateful to Western Australians for the opportunity to serve. I would not let that mob opposite back on these benches!

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HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [1.50 pm]: While I was listening to the Deputy Leader of the House's contribution, I was reminded of some commentary by Dennis Cometti. I entered this debate optimistically and I left a little "misty optically" after listening to that rather flat defence of the government's performance.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: Wait for this! An interesting observation was made, which has been made previously, criticising my friend and colleague Hon Dr Steve Thomas for bringing this form of motion back to the house for attention. There is a reason for that. I categorise it this way: if this government has been a game of two halves, with a very impressive, strong performance politically in the first half, from 2017 to 2021, after the half-time siren and the break, it has been dialling it in for the last two years. I think the government does not have the kind of appetite, focus and dare I say it humility to deal with some very troubling aspects of our community—that is, some very deep and entrenched failures in service delivery. I can only categorise the situation that way at the moment. I will reflect on the last two years in particular, although the problems have been there in the lead-up to that point somewhat masked by COVID. In fact, largely masked by COVID.

Considering the \$6 billion surplus the government presently has and its failure to deliver anything approximating community standards in health, mental health, housing and law and order, I can only put it this way: never has there been a Premier or government in this state that has done, and is doing, so little for so few with so much. The most pernicious, obvious vector of government failure is the public health service. The government went to the election on a mantra of "safe and strong, safe and strong". That was undergirded by the absolutely superhuman efforts of our police and nurses, largely. If one were to make an argument that Western Australia was safe and strong in comparable terms, obviously there is a strong argument for that. There was a dimension of political leadership, but all the heavy lifting was done by frontline health professionals, including our nurses, and our police. Frankly, over the course of the last two years, those two critically important groups have been treated with nothing but contempt by the Premier and the government, consistently. The government has taken those people for granted.

I want to focus on some telling facts about the state of our public health system. A report by the Australian Medical Association titled *Australian public hospitals in logjam* dropped on 31 January this year. It is a report on the entrenched difficulties faced by public hospitals Australia-wide. I concede that running a public health system is always difficult. It is difficult nationwide. But the performance of Western Australian public hospitals compared with the national performance is very sad reading. I think we are somewhere in the bottom 10 for emergency department performance. If that does not drive people to act, particularly the new Minister for Health and the Premier, I do not know what will drive them. I think we have a significant problem there.

I will touch on two areas: ambulance ramping and the elective surgery waitlist. As I again bring up the issue of ambulance ramping, may I remind members opposite that ambulance ramping was put on the political radar by none other than the previous Minister for Health, Hon Roger Cook. As opposition spokesperson for health, he campaigned on this issue month in and month out. He thought it was a critically important area and condemned the Barnett government for perceived failure. I forget which year it was, but in around August 2015 or 2016 there was in the vicinity of 1 100 hours of ramping recorded. Hon Roger Cook called that effectively a crisis level of ramping. If 1 100 hours of ambulance ramping a month is crisis level, how does the government categorise the level of dysfunction when there is regularly in excess of 5 000 or 6 000 hours of ambulance ramping recorded month in and month out? This is a test that the McGowan Labor government set itself. It set the bar and it has failed to jump over it.

During the last year of the Barnett government, I think the cumulative hours of annual ramping was in the vicinity of 10 000 to 11 000 hours. It is approximately 65 000 or 66 000 hours now. Under this government's watch, during its first four years, which were politically strong, and the last two years combined, it has made that problem six or seven times worse. And not once has there ever been a scintilla of ownership or responsibility taken for that complete and utter failure. When we go to an election in two years' time, who knows what the result will be. But I can guarantee members one thing: people will not be talking about the Barnett government's alleged financial record; I doubt very much they will even be talking about COVID; they will be talking about failure in the health system and the fact that ambulances are permanently parked outside EDs because there are not enough beds available for and staff available to see patients. That is what people care about.

I am always very enthusiastic to speak to a motion like this one, which members opposite dismiss out of hand. On a number of occasions, a member of this place whom I quite like has accused the opposition of politicising the health issue. It is our job to draw political and parliamentary attention to this level of dysfunction because the people of Western Australia deserve a lot better from the government and the health system generally.

I also want to reflect somewhat on the elective surgery waiting list. At some stage—this is applicable either nationally or internationally—we have to change the name, because elective surgery is not "non-essential". It is elective. It is not a person presenting at emergency or a life-threatening condition, but it is serious necessary surgery and we have to find a better way to categorise it.

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Obviously, I understand that there was disruption to and expansion of the elective surgery waiting list across the three categories during COVID. But the story that has not been told is that that list had been building over the four years or so leading up to COVID. The waiting list has not come off that much and it continues to grow. I think it is very likely—I am going on some half-remembered figures here—that in 2025, this government will go to an election with an elective surgery waiting list that is between 50 and 60 per cent larger than the one it inherited in 2017, despite there being effectively net negative growth in population. That is a terrible outcome. I want to focus on the three categories because it is a serious issue. It is sometimes dismissed or treated flippantly. I have heard very ageist and I think contemptible remarks about “Who cares if you’re 65 or 70 years old and you’ve been waiting three years for a knee replacement?” Frankly, I find that offensive but it is not an uncommon assertion. People’s medical needs are demonised, dismissed or normalised through the expansion of this waiting list. The clinical description of a category 1 elective surgery is that the condition has the potential to deteriorate quickly to the point at which it may become an emergency. The description for category 2 is semi-urgent surgery, causes pain, dysfunction or disability. Category 3 causes pain, dysfunction or disability but is not as likely to present as an emergency. Why do I say all this? There are clinical guidelines for the surgical attention of people who present with those categories of malady. I am sure Hon Dr Brian Walker will correct me where I go wrong. Effectively, there has been growth in each of those three categories in the median waiting time outside the boundary—outside the clinically recommended time to attend to them, there has been growth. There is now an expansion in the median waiting time for all categories of elective surgery, year in and year out. That is true irrespective of COVID. What is that to say? It is to say that the health system, despite a \$6 billion surplus, is not meeting the needs of the community of Western Australia. That is why we bring motions like this to the house. That is the only reason.

I was interested somewhat in the deputy leader’s contribution because he addressed some forecast, anticipated expenditure by the government in a range of areas within the health portfolio. I will let others speak about Geraldton Hospital but I was reminded, if other members did not hear it, that the most recent announcement was one of 17 such announcements about the future of Geraldton Hospital. I will provide this advice gratuitously to government members: I think they have a fixation on spin and media posturing rather than service delivery. I think the government should do this with Geraldton Hospital as an example; before the next media statement is issued, just build the hospital. Set out and build what is supposed to be built—what the government committed in 2016 or 2017. Just stop it, because the government is undermining its own credibility and that of a number of its local members, who might be only one-term members, frankly, if that is the standard they are out there to sell. I think that is disappointing.

In the Premier’s Statement yesterday, there was some frankly pretty heroic language about being active in the health space and how much money has been set aside for health infrastructure. It is worth reminding the house sometimes of what the facts are because sometimes the facts get in the way of the government’s story—they increasingly get in the way of the government’s story, I am finding. Over the first five years of the McGowan government, a total of \$1.3 billion was dedicated to health infrastructure. Compare that with over \$5.5 billion spent on health infrastructure by the Barnett government in the same period. The rate of effort, even in nominal terms, is one-quarter to one-fifth of the previous government, although that government’s performance has been criticised. I hear a lot about “We are building the equivalent of a new tertiary hospital by putting more beds into more hospitals.” When? Where are they? I keep hearing about the new women’s and babies’ hospital, for which there is obviously a dire need, but where is it? Here is my theory on why it has not been delivered or why it is not being delivered very quickly. It is because the government has developed some kind of political obsession with Metronet. Metronet started life as a \$3 billion capital commitment. It comprised about five or six sub-projects, which, if the Minister for Transport had stuck to, she would have largely built all of Metronet by now, or be very close to delivering the final line. But what happened? The government bit off more than it could chew. The \$3 billion to be spent on Metronet projects has now ballooned to beyond \$10 billion. A project suite that began with five to six components now has 13 to 14. Why is the government spending all this money on Metronet when critical health needs are going unmet? Let me talk about the government performance on Metronet. How much has been delivered? The Forrestfield–Airport Link—who started it? It was the Liberal government. The Labor government got to cut the ribbon, two years late. Aside from potentially, just potentially, the opening of the Yanchep rail extension and services commencing before the 2025 election, that is the only bit of Metronet that has been delivered. When the public of Western Australia look at the government’s largesse, they see the Premier jumping in his money bin and wonder where the money has gone. Government members say it has all been spent on Metronet, but where is Metronet? That is why nothing else is being built. The government is competing with the private sector and has completely over-programmed its infrastructure program beyond all reasonable expectation of delivery. It is competing with the private market, squeezing labour and supply-side issues anyway, just to underdeliver. Instead of coming in here and waxing lyrical about times gone by, I would really encourage government members, from this moment forth, to concentrate on the issues that present themselves to them in the here and now, as uncomfortable as that might be. As ill-equipped as they might be to deal with those issues, it is their responsibility.

Hon Kyle McGinn: Are you saying you’re better equipped with two members?

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Hon TJORN SIBMA: Well, my friend, it is quality over quantity!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It is quality over quantity. I hold myself in high regard; I admit it! I have a huge ego. Largely, it is justified.

Hon Dan Caddy interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: It is justified when I look at the quality of contributions. I think it is important to focus on the quality of contributions in this chamber. I am often reminded of the old adage, which my nan used to tell me: the empty vessel makes the most noise. There are a few empty vessels over on that side of the chamber, I am pretty sure! They are consistently flip-flopping around, with misdirected internal rage for whatever—God knows—factional reason, not focused —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Let's talk about factions!

Hon TJORN SIBMA: There are no factions in the Labor government, are there!

Several members interjected.

Hon TJORN SIBMA: I look forward to the government's upper house preselection process and all the disappointed souls who come out of that! They are focused on themselves, not delivering for the people of Western Australia. Two years into his second term, the Premier is dialling it in. A fish rots from the head down. This is a very whiffy government and it really needs to lift its game. I hope that the government resets itself and demonstrates that it is halfway interested in doing the job it was elected to do and improves its performance in health, law and order, and housing. I really look forward to improved government performance. I hope that this motion somewhat encourages my friends opposite. I stand absolutely in lock step with my friend Hon Dr Steve Thomas. This motion should recommend itself to the house. It is a shame that we will probably have to divide on it and that the government will refuse to take on the job it has been set. But, with that, my contribution is over, just for today.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.09 pm]: Here we are again. I thought that the member made some sensible points during his first minute, and it degenerated from there. We come into the chamber again this year to much of the same from the opposition. The point was made that these motions are dismissed. They are not dismissed—of course, we are happy to debate the motions that opposition members bring to the house—but they are refuted.

I think that Hon Klara Andric made a very good point. Members opposite can keep saying it as long as they like; it does not mean that it is true. These motions lack substance. They are not hitting the mark with members of the community and the press is not really picking them up either. Members opposite might want to rethink their strategy. It is usually the other way around. I will just enlighten the member on how it works. We will read an article in *The West Australian*—a fine newspaper—and then members opposite will bring the substance of that into the house. It probably should be the other way around, but that is the way it seems to have worked over the last couple of years. Keep it up! It is all right, but I think it is becoming a little bit tiresome to everyone.

I will just run over the first few points. Anyone who has ever run a business knows this. I love this little gag I tell from time to time: how do you get a Western Australian Liberal into a small business? You give them a big one first! We take the advice of members opposite and we often do the opposite, because their record in government was appalling and their record in opposition is appalling. This is a responsible government that is managing the state's finances efficiently. It is the envy of the nation. The state had its AAA credit rating restored, which was lost under the previous government. Why would a government that is managing the finances so responsibly, soundly and well take advice from people who have no track record of doing that? That is the first question I put to members opposite. We acknowledge the points that they make and, from time to time—we can learn from anyone—think about those points and how we might want to consider them moving forward. But as blanket advice for government, I think members opposite are wasting their breath over there. However, we will run through a couple of these things, and we will humour the motion for the two hours that we have today.

Members, the iron ore price is volatile. It changes dramatically and it can change quickly. It is a world-traded commodity. When we are budgeting for a volatile commodity, we have to be cautious, just as we do in farming. We have just done our farm budget for the next year and we were naturally cautious in the prices we expect to receive for our produce. Being cautious is sound financial management. If members want to be reckless, they can knock themselves out! They have done that.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: We're talking about the money you already have. Did you make good money out of that?

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Hon DARREN WEST: I am talking about —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Members, I want to hear the contribution from Hon Darren West, and it will be assisted if there is less interjection.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Deputy President. We are naturally cautious. Just to touch on the member's point, if we look back over the last year, there are a lot of similarities with farm budgets across the state and the state government's budget in the actual figures received. We can find all those numbers. Farming was profitable last year because the yields and the price we received for our commodities in most cases exceeded what we expected, so there will be profit, as there is in the state budget. There are many reasons for that, and I am sure the honourable member knows what some of those reasons are, but we are very proud of our cautious iron ore assumptions, and I think that we need to keep doing that. That is prudent financial management. If prices go higher than we expect, we will have more money than we expected rather than less money than we expected, as we had under the former government.

We have said it time and again: we have learnt from the mistakes of the Barnett government over those eight and a half long years when the people's money did not matter a toss. It went up against the wall on thousands of ridiculous spending sprees, and with no thought given to what might happen if the iron ore price corrected. That all came true. We found ourselves with a dud GST deal and we had to fix that mess. There was a \$44 billion budget prediction of total debt. We had to fix that mess. It is now under \$30 billion for the first time in years. We are the only state in the commonwealth that is reducing debt. Western Australia is the envy of the country.

Hon Peter Foster: Of the world.

Hon DARREN WEST: Thank you, Hon Peter Foster; I think that is a very good addition. Western Australia is the envy of the world. Very few places are performing as well as Western Australia. I will not have that there is anything wrong with the way that the Treasurer and the state government has managed the finances.

The 2022–23 midyear review, delivered in mid-December, included a revised iron ore price assumption of \$US87.40 a tonne, which is significantly lower than the average of \$US138.20 a tonne in 2021–22, because we do not expect that the boom cycle will last forever and we have to have one eye on what might come after that. Traditionally, our mining sectors have been very cyclical, so we make no apologies for that. China's crude steel production fell by 2.1 per cent last year, which has a direct impact on iron ore. Steel production outside China fell by 6.9 per cent in 2022, so we can already see that the demand for iron ore will continue to soften. I could talk about that a lot. I am sure that the member knows about this, because he is quite an intelligent man when he puts his mind to it. He comes in here and leads us all to wonder about that. But we can find all this information, and I just wonder how he could do it any better. If we were to say, "Let's work on a \$US130 iron ore price for the rest of the year", and we did not achieve that, he would come in and call us irresponsible and reckless. I think it is a situation in which we need to be cautious. This is the people's money and we need to treat it as such.

I also refute both the Leader of the Opposition and Hon Tjorn Sibma's contributions that we do not care about improving services or that we are not trying to improve services. That is blatantly untrue. One of the best things we can do to ensure good services for the people of Western Australia is to manage the finances accordingly so that future governments and future generations are not left struggling under the weight of billions of dollars' worth of debt and having to pay the interest on that. Instead, that money can go back into services. That is one legacy we can leave, and I think it will be the Premier's strongest and greatest legacy when he finishes up his time as Premier of Western Australia. His legacy will not be the management of COVID, because that will be in the past. The legacy will be his and this government's strong economic management.

We have had to make some hard decisions. I think it is a little unfair to criticise us for the pressure on the health system. Yes, there is pressure on the health system. Yes, our frontline healthcare workers have had to work above and beyond for a few years now. They are getting tired and the system is under pressure. People might say that that is a failure of government, but that means that every government everywhere in the world has failed. I am not sure about that. Health systems all around the world are under pressure, because we have not only the added weight of the COVID pandemic and all that comes with that, but also the regular elective and lifesaving surgery and all the annual day-to-day running of the health system. That is still there on top of all this extra tension that has come onto the health system because of COVID. We have had furloughed staff and a shortage of doctors. All these things add up to put pressure on the health system. We have now made some changes to the St John Ambulance contract as a result of the excellent work of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, which found some flaws in the way that service was delivered and operated, and that will be improved into the future to be more streamlined with the health system.

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I think that standing up and having a cheap shot because the system is under pressure is actually disrespectful to the people who are working in that sector. Those people are doing their best. We are resourcing them as well as we can, as Hon Stephen Dawson, the deputy leader, said. We have put in lots more healthcare workers and a lot of extra staff, but there is extra demand. People are turning up at emergency departments because they cannot afford to not be bulk-billed. That is a fact of life. We can look at a lot of places and see pressure on the health system. People are turning up at emergency departments because they cannot afford to pay \$70 to see a doctor, and that is an issue for the health system. It shifts the onus of responsibility from the federal government to the state government. I am pleased to see that the Albanese government is looking at addressing that with bulk-billed urgent care clinics. They will take a while to get here, so we will have to slog on in the meantime. Once the urgent care clinics are delivered and built in Western Australia, they will take an enormous amount of pressure off our under-pressure emergency departments.

I am very proud of the achievement of the Geraldton Health Campus project. It has taken us longer to deliver on that project than we had hoped because there was a cyclone and we did not want to pull all the services, tradies and everybody out of the midwest while people were trying to rebuild their homes. We made a conscious decision to wait. It will now cost us more to build than we thought, and we are about to have a second go at the tender process. The health campus will be a good outcome for the people of Geraldton. I remind members that if they want to have a look at the hospital scoreboard in Geraldton, it is Labor—3, coalition—zero. That is the scoreboard. That is what we have done. This is the third time that we have delivered a major hospital development to Geraldton. It has never been done under a coalition government, so I am very proud of that. There will be 100 extra staff working in that hospital. There will be more jobs in the local community and a better service. There will be mental health services. We have already put a step-up, step-down service in Geraldton, and we will complement that with an acute psychiatric unit at the hospital and a dedicated mental health emergency department. When we came to government, we found these very glaring gaps in the health system and we have worked together with the community and the wonderful doctors and healthcare staff in Geraldton to deliver. We have not got as far down the road as we had hoped, but that project will be delivered and it will be delivered by Labor. Only Labor delivers those big projects, such as the Geraldton Health Campus, in the regions.

The next press release, honourable member, that comes out will be announcing the successful tender. There will be a press release to announce that because it is important that the community is informed about every step of this process. We have been very up-front about the delays. We have been very up-front about everything. The tender announcement that will be the next press release, so the member can look forward to that one. The member has been counting press releases, and that is very astute of him. That will be the eighteenth press release. It will be a great outcome. The project will begin and it will employ lots of local tradespersons and people in the operation of that hospital and, most importantly, provide a great service for Geraldton and the midwest.

We have put \$6.2 billion into the mental health system since the 2021–22 budget. Six billion dollars is a big spend in the health and mental health system. As the member will be aware, in this environment we can allocate the money, but it is then a matter of finding the staff and getting those works done. Everything is dragging out a little bit longer than we had hoped. That is a symptom of a strong economy. The member cannot have it both ways. He can trash the economy and we can have the opposite effect and have a recession, like we found, or we can have a strong economy but there are some issues associated with that and there can be too much work going on.

We have also put a \$2.5 billion investment in the 2022–23 budget, and I have a few figures here that I do not have time to run through in my aide-memoire. We have put significant investment into health and mental health. I am very proud of the work we have done in that space. We have invested in lots of hospitals in the city, Joondalup, Fremantle, Bunbury, Peel, Laverton, Tom Price, Newman and Meekatharra, and there are others to come. Therefore, we have made a significant investment in health and mental health. We have a doctor shortage, and we are working with our federal colleagues on that. It is a challenge around the world. We are meeting that challenge.

Other investments in the 2022–23 state budget, in the midyear review, include half a billion dollars for education and training. Education is never lost, and I am sure Hon Peter Collier, as an educator, will agree with me on that. Education is never lost, and so the more skills and training that we can put into our young people, people who are already working and people who are looking to upskill, the better long-term legacy it will leave for Western Australia, especially regional Western Australia. We have invested in lots of primary schools, with science labs and Aboriginal and Islander education officers. Lots of great work has been done by the former Minister for Education and Training Hon Sue Ellery and the current Minister for Education, Hon Dr Tony Buti, to better prepare this generation and the next generation of young people for the jobs of the future. We have invested \$450 million, nearly half a billion dollars, in strong communities, child protection services, more frontline workers, early intervention programs and expanding the Target 120 program. Target 120 has been a successful program. It is not done yet. There is still work to do. We have invested in the indexation for activities delivered by the community services sector, which was long called for; it had been before we came to government. We have invested in more support for people with disabilities and

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delivered a boost for family and domestic violence initiatives. This is something that we will always have to work on. It is something that we will always have to plug away at, and it is vital that we do.

We are expanding the remote communities fund. We have invested \$320 million for a new metropolitan health facility for the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. How long was that talked about? Has it been 30 or 40 years? DPIRD is in that crummy, old facility in South Perth. It was talked about. I remember the then Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, saying that the money had been approved and they were about to start building, but nothing happened. Hon Alannah MacTiernan got that project done. We have invested \$320 million for a new facility for DPIRD down at Murdoch. It is fantastic and long overdue, and it was done by a Labor government.

We have invested \$40 million in packages for youth justice initiatives in the Kimberley. This is a very hot topic. I know that Hon Neil Thomson is very interested in that. But we have to just chip away at this. These are not easy problems to solve, we all know that, but we have the money to get the resources that we need.

We have invested in the Banksia Hill Detention Centre. We have invested \$125 million in housing. We have delivered 1 000 social houses in this term of government; that was a great announcement by the Minister for Housing yesterday. No-one has ever invested more into regional roads than this government. We are back investing in regional rail. We have some money allocated to open one of the tier 3 lines that was closed by the Liberal–National government. That is great news and has been very well received in the wheatbelt. We are also partnering with CBH Group and Arc Infrastructure for faster load trains, so instead of a train taking 11 hours to load, with some of the funding that we have injected into the grain logistics supply chain system, it will now take three hours. Trains can then get to Perth, get unloaded and be most of the way back in the same time. That will put a lot of grain back on rail and take it off the roads. The roads are struggling under the weight of record harvests; we have had two in a row now. Our farmers are fantastic and have done an amazing job to achieve record harvests twice in a row. CBH is fantastic and has done an amazing job two years in a row. We have to get that grain to the ships and get it out to the world, and that is what we are focused on.

I will not talk about Metronet because I am a regional member and I know Hon Tjorn Sibma is quite fixated with it. It is a wonderful transport system. We need a world-class transport system in Perth. The events of the last weekend — Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon DARREN WEST: Last weekend in Perth we had Sting, the Ultimate Fighting Championship and the Red Hot Chili Peppers. We had all these influencers from social media. They are not really my go, but they all raved about Perth and what a great place it was. Therefore, we do need a world-class transport system, and it helps us regional people as well because we often have parents who retire down here, and kids at school and university down here, and it does help us when we come to Perth from time to time. It is great to be able to board the train at Midland when you have driven down from Northam. It is great to be able to park the car there and duck into the city and back out again and miss all that traffic—your country numberplates are sometimes a bit of a giveaway when you get on the freeway!

We have done a lot of work in the economic diversification, climate action and digital technology spaces under Minister MacTiernan and now Minister Jarvis. It is great to see that we finally have farms on broadband internet, which can run the whole farm. That is an amazing addition and outcome.

There is so much more that we have done, but we have to come into the house, on a Wednesday, and listen to members opposite say, “It is all doom and gloom and the failure of the government to use the massive income it received in the boom.” We are using that income. We are paying down debt. Debt is under \$30 billion. It was projected to be \$44 billion when we came into government. We came to government in a recession. We are now the envy of the country. I really do not know why members opposite keep banging on about this. Of course there is always work to do for the government, but the fundamentals are sound, the economy is strong and the people were kept safe through COVID. Members opposite might laugh that off, but I can tell them that every day people come up to me in the electorate and say, “You guys did an amazing job through COVID. Mark McGowan did an amazing job through COVID.” They appreciate what we did. It was hard and we faced opposition from members opposite. We faced opposition from *The West Australian*. We faced opposition from the Tourism Council WA. There were lots of people who wanted us to take a different approach, but we took the approach we took. There will be a review into what we did, but the Premier has said, and I think he is right, that if the same thing were to happen again, we will do it all the same way, because we kept our people safe and our economy strong, and that is important.

Hon Stephen Dawson made a good point: it is a privilege to be chosen by the people of Western Australia to occupy these benches and hold these roles, and we never wake up any day and forget about that privilege. We work for the people of Western Australia and we are proud to do that, and so far they appreciate the work that we are

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doing for them. We do not always get it right, but we do our best, and when we do not get it right, we fix it. The Premier grew up in the country. He has a lot of common sense. He is a smart guy. He knows what is best for managing our government. He listens and takes advice from others. Between us, I think we have formed a very sound and competent government and we will continue to do so.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [2.29 pm]: I stand to support the motion. In doing so, I say at the outset that I find it extraordinary that members opposite feel that everything is just peachy out there in our community because it is simply not. If they genuinely think that post the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is just drifting along with a colourful, comfortable quality of life at the moment, they need to get out more, because they are not. I would like to focus on two of the groups that are most marginalised in our community, identify issues that exist with them and show the deficiencies of this government in dealing with them. In doing so, I will do a bit of a Labor here and recap a previous Labor government. State governments are traditionally service delivery governments. The federal government looks after the big picture stuff and state governments look after things like education, health, law and order, transport et cetera—service delivery. If I remember correctly, when I came into this place, it was under a previous Labor government. Service delivery was not one of its fortes. We had massive teacher shortages. We had the lowest paid teachers in the nation, we had the lowest resourced schools in our nation, we had thousands of kids without a teacher in front of them, we ran out of gas and electricity, we had the great escape down at the Supreme Court, and we had people on trolleys in our hospitals. Was that good, effective service delivery? Of course it was not.

It is very easy at the moment to get captured by COVID, and that is what has happened. We are gradually emerging from COVID. Let me remind members that prior to COVID, the Liberal Party had a 9.4 per cent swing to it in Darling Range. We won the overwhelming majority of the vote in the federal election. When COVID hit, we closed the four access routes into Western Australia. The Premier did a good job closing down the state. Quite frankly, the government did a good job dealing with COVID, but we still have to live. Now that the dark clouds of COVID are rising, all the cracks are starting to emerge. I like the fact that the minister and the parliamentary secretary have stood up and read their speaking notes from the various departments, saying how wonderful things are. They ought to come out to my office in Warwick and look at what is going on in that area with the drug abuse, violence, despair and homelessness and say that everything is peachy because it is not. The minister and the parliamentary secretary ought to be on the committee that I am on inquiring into homelessness services and say that everything is peachy because it is not. They should deal with the dozens of families that I have had to deal with since the Banksia Hill issue has arisen in the public arena and say everything is peachy and the government is great for spending its \$6.5 billion looking after some of our most marginalised people in the community because it is not.

I am going to talk very briefly about Banksia Hill Detention Centre. I have made numerous speeches about it. I feel very strongly about it. Believe it or not, in political terms, from a social perspective and contrary to popular belief, I am a bit of a leftie. I was an Aboriginal affairs minister and I was an education minister. I wear my record with Aboriginal people in particular with pride, and the same with education. We opened 21 child and parent centres to assist those who were most marginalised. I opened 37 Aboriginal kindergartens as education minister. I was the first education minister to specifically direct money to the low socio-economic groupings, to the Aboriginal people. I introduced the Aboriginal cultural standards framework in our schools. I introduced Aboriginal elders in our schools. I wear that proudly. I wear that as a badge of honour.

I sit back now and look at some of the most marginalised juveniles in our community who feel so much despair that they want to take their own lives. The year before last, the figure was 351. That really saddens me. To have the minister and the Premier come out and make political capital out of it is absolutely appalling. To hear the evidence that we heard today about the lack of information that exists within the department and what goes on in that facility is really concerning. It needs to be a rehabilitation facility. It is not. The Premier can put his hands on his hips and tell parents to do their job. Honestly! He says we should go into some of those communities and tell parents to look after their kids. Members should see what these people have to experience. Everything is not peachy with those kids. I have said it before and I will say it again: is it going to take the death of one of those juveniles to wake you guys up? You are the Labor Party. This is your bread and butter. To the government backbenchers, find your voice and do something or else you will have the death of one of those juveniles on your hands. I really hope you do not.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members! I am struggling to hear Hon Peter Collier.

Several members interjected.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Excuse me, Mr Deputy President. I sat in silence for the entire debate, and I ask for the same respect.

Hon Stephen Dawson interjected.

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Hon PETER COLLIER: I did not like a lot of what I heard either, mate, but I kept my mouth shut.

The next area I would like to look at is the police portfolio. The police look after law and order in our community. If members opposite think that everything is peachy with law and order, they need to get a grip. All they have to do is look at the latest crime statistics. They are absolutely appalling. Family-related violence has increased 35 per cent over the last five years since these guys have been in office. Offences against the person have increased 14 per cent since these guys have been in office. Let us look at the area that is most prominent, and that is the regions. Let us look at Carnarvon. The crime rates in Carnarvon have absolutely gone through the roof. For example, there were 12 family assaults in 2017. In 2022, there were 51. There were four cases of threatening behaviour against the family in 2017. That figure doubled to eight in 2022. The total number of crimes in Carnarvon in 2017 was 572. In 2022, there were 801. Let us look at Broome, where the figures are equally stark. A total of 2 872 crimes were committed in Broome in 2017. Last year, there were 4 085. Everything is not peachy in those regions.

Let us look at the number of police officer vacancies in Western Australia. When these statistics came out at the end of last year, there were 182 vacancies. Guess where most of them are? They are in the regions. A total of 96 out of 182 are in the regions. There are 22 vacancies in the goldfields, 14 in the great southern, 14 in the Kimberley, 14 in the midwest–Gascoyne, 11 in the Pilbara, 13 in the south west and eight in the wheatbelt. We have problems in the regions because of the low vacancies. All we hear ad infinitum from the minister and the Premier is that there will be 950 additional officers. The government will have nowhere near that because there is a cultural issue within the police force at the moment. The minister is constantly carrying on about the 950 additional officers. I loved the following exchange between Hon Stephen Dawson and the Leader of the House in November 2021 when I asked about the number of vacancies —

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

...

The McGowan government is delivering 950 extra police officers over four years, the single largest increase in police officer numbers.

Hon Sue Ellery: That's great. How many?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: There are 950 extra. Over 400 new officers will have graduated this year.

That is rubbish. It did not happen. It is not going to happen. It is getting worse because there is a real cultural issue within our police force. I will get to that in a moment. By the government's own figures, the target for 30 June 2020 was 6 637, and it was 7 587 on 30 June 2024. The reality is that in June 2021, the number increased to 7 112; and in June 2022, it went down to 6 893, a decline of 200 officers. When there should have been an increase of 350 officers, there was a decline of 200. The government has no hope of getting that number. It is a shame. I want there to be more officers. I do not want to see any vacancies in the regions. I want to see more police on our streets. I genuinely want to see more police in Hillarys, Scarborough, Northbridge and Mandurah. That is basic service delivery of our state government, but it is not happening.

Let us look at those resignations. Do you know how many resignations we had last year, Mr Deputy President? There were 465 resignations from the Western Australia Police Force. The year before it was 188; the average runs between 100 and 200. The last time it was even close to that was back in 2006, when there were 289 resignations, and 2007, when there were 300 resignations. Guess who was in office then? The Labor Party. There were 465 police resignations just last year and a further 40 in January. I did not get a response to my question to the minister yesterday. That is no disrespect to him—I think I am going to get one today—but I already know the answer: it is 40. Forty police officers resigned in January.

During the estimates hearings in June last year I asked about the numbers of resignations. The response I got was, in part —

The number of police officer resignations in the last 12 months until April was 221. We are currently tracking 44 people leaving a month in terms of attrition in the last six months. On average, it is 33 a month.

In fact, it is not, on average, but that is the response I got. Yesterday I asked what the estimated or projected number of police retirements were in 2023 and 2024. The reply, according to the uncorrected *Hansard*, was —

The current police officer plan to June 2024 assumes that 29 officers per month will retire from the agency. All forms of attrition are included in this assumption including retirement.

Less than 12 months ago I was told that the average was 33 per month, yet WAPOL is now telling me that the assumption is 29. It is not even close to that. We had 40 last month, for example, and 465 for the entire 12 months. I do not know who is doing the projections at WAPOL or whether the government is involved, but for goodness' sake. The number of officers who are walking out the door every day is a cause for concern.

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When the Minister for Police has been questioned about this in the other place, he has said on several occasions that it is entirely attributable to the economy and other opportunities. That is garbage. Members who have been in opposition will know that in opposition, you get a lot of people feeding you information. To say that a tsunami of police are offering me advice and information at the moment would be an understatement, particularly those who are either leaving or have already left. There is enormous disenchantment within WAPOL at the moment. Officers are not leaving because of the economy and other opportunities; they are leaving because they are disillusioned.

What is the government's response to that? First of all, it has lowered the physical standard to get into WAPOL; I got that information through questions in the estimates hearings. It is also allowing graduates who have not yet finished the course to stay in WAPOL until they finish the course. Even though they are marching out at Joondalup, they have not yet finished the course. That is what the government is doing in that instance. It has now started on an international campaign to try to get police officers to come to Western Australia. The Labor Party tried that with teachers back in 2006 and it did not work. It is a very simple equation.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Did you not try that when you were a minister?

Hon PETER COLLIER: No, I —

Hon Stephen Dawson: Did your government not try to get public sector workers?

Hon PETER COLLIER: The member has had his go. I have five minutes.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I think you did.

Hon PETER COLLIER: I did not try any international recruitment for teaching.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I'll check that and bring it back to the house.

Hon PETER COLLIER: Excuse me. I did not try any international recruitment for teaching.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members!

Hon PETER COLLIER: We are dealing specifically here with police or teachers. With WAPOL, the government has now gone overseas. I say to members: please treat police with a bit of respect because they do not feel loved. Do not send them out chasing ambulances. The government tried that last year, and it fell flat on its face. The government did that; it is not the gospel according to Pete. It actually used police as ambulances. I asked a question on notice to get the exact number, and the reply was —

There have been 175 Code 85 'St John Ambulance Medical Tasks' transmitted for action between 23 May 2022 to 30 November 2022 ...

Police officers did not sign up to be ambulance drivers. The government should not try to rectify its ambulance ramping by using police officers. That is like putting a bandaid on a broken arm.

The single most compelling and significant issue that police face at the moment is mental health. Police officers are desperately suffering in silence, and that is why they are leaving. They feel that there is no support. Again, last year I asked about the number of mental health support programs for police officers. In 2019, a total of 777 police personnel accessed these programs. In 2021, a total of 2 619 police officers accessed them. That is an increase from 777 in 2019 to more than 2 600 two years later. That means there has been a blowout of more than 300 per cent of officers accessing mental health support. They are accessing these programs because of the increasingly complex nature of our society, and they are asking for a very simple program called the Switch Off program, whereby when they finish work for the day, having endured enormous trauma in many instances, they can switch off. That is one of the fundamental requirements that the Police Union and police have asked for from the government, and the government has ignored them and said no.

This is something that desperately needs to be addressed by the government. If the government is serious about overcoming the tsunami of officers who are leaving the force, it has to start treating them like humans. That is not happening at the moment. I spent an enormous amount of time last year dealing with a program called Soldiers and Sirens, which is a specific course to assist officers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. A princely sum of \$1.5 million—that is all they asked for—would have helped assist dozens of police officers, but on no occasion did the government offer a reason as to why it would not fund it; it just would not fund it. Members opposite can beat their chests all they like about the programs that are going on and the \$6.5 billion surplus, or whatever it is, but these sorts of programs are essential. It is called basic service delivery.

I wrote an opinion piece at the end of last year on this issue. It states, in part —

In a display of gobsmacking ignorance of his portfolio, Police Minister Paul Papalia said recently the record resignations of police were “entirely attributable to the economy and other opportunities”. This lack of understanding on the part of the minister would be amusing if it were not so serious.

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Obviously the minister did not like that article; I get that, but one has to be careful as a minister to not have too much of a glass jaw. He said that the government was doing this, that and the other and that he was taking care of the bikies and being tough on crime and guns et cetera. That is fine; I acknowledge that, and the opposition supported the government on the bikie legislation and the gun legislation. All I am saying is that if the minister continues his rhetoric that police are leaving because of other opportunities, it means he is ignorant of what is actually going on in his portfolio.

I concluded the article by saying —

As the dark clouds of COVID rise, the failure of the Labor Government to deliver core services to the community is being exposed. While having a \$7 billion surplus might be a flattering go-to talking point for the Premier and his ministers, the truth is, those workers at the coal face that have done the hard yards during COVID are hurting.

They desperately need to feel valued and respected.

This is particularly pertinent to our police force. It would assist the situation if the Minister for Police shifted his rhetoric from “it’s entirely the economy” to “I am listening”.

This is basic service delivery and it is what the government needs to do if it is to stop these resignations from the Western Australia Police Force.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [2.49 pm]: First of all, I have to thank the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the House for a masterclass in how to give a speech. There were wonderful points on both sides.

Hon Dan Caddy: It is his seventh time; he should be good at it!

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Good practice makes perfect, I am sure.

The topics in this motion range wide and far, but the first one is iron ore dependency and the iron ore price over the last year. Both sides acknowledged that the iron ore price will go up and down and that we become dependent on another country for how our budget is managed. To be dependent upon a foreign country, especially one that is happy to manipulate other countries for its own benefit, is going to make us vulnerable, particularly in Western Australia. Therefore, I would put it to the house and, indeed, to the people that depending on the iron ore price alone is going to be a great way of making us very vulnerable. I would reject that. It is nice to have a resource and it is nice to have a facility, but if our economy will be dependent upon a foreign country buying our resource, we will basically be a vassal state to other countries. I find that totally unacceptable.

I also found interesting the backwards and forwards with some wonderful points on both sides, and this debate of right versus wrong: “We did it better and sucks, boo to you”, which I think is the typical political approach, is it not? “I am doing it perfectly, and of course you did it all wrong.” I understand this; we are all friends in this house and we all get on well together, but we have our particular sides to defend. That does not serve the people of Western Australia, because what we really need to deal with is not how well I have done or not done. The question is: what is the underlying fundamental problem? If we are going to put a plaster on a problem and not fix the underlying cause, we are deferring it and chucking money at the problem without fixing the real underlying problem. A number of things were mentioned today that I could go into in some detail, but before I do that, I would like to bring to the house’s attention the statement by the minister, Hon Stephen Dawson, about the WA innovation strategy. I thoroughly approve of it and I thank the minister very much for that, because this is where we need to be going. I could not agree more. By looking at iron ore and mining, we are looking at the status quo. We are doing more of what has been done before and we are trying to do better, which is a recipe for disaster.

We can look at this, for example, in the health service. I mentioned at the beginning of my term in politics how many millions the McGowan government has spent on mental health. My reply, as a frontline doctor, was that we are not seeing it at the frontline. I am seeing people right now with ropes hanging in their garage, wanting to commit suicide and not being able to find a psychiatrist to take them on board. This week, I have children with ADHD for whom there is no-one to give a diagnosis in a long process, therefore not having an education assistant and being left deprived in school for 18 months of lost education. That will build us a foundation for poor development in schools, leading to a foundation of poor success in later life because our system does not allow us to diagnose and treat people now. I will challenge anyone here to take one of my psychiatric patients and find a place for them to get treated now. It does not happen. Mental health, as members all realise, is very valuable to me. We heard just now about the effect of mental health deficiencies among serving police officers. They can only cut down so many people from ropes before they take some of that on board themselves and they cannot take any more. There are only so many traffic accidents with maimed bodies and distressed relatives that they can attend before they crack themselves. We all have a limit. There are only so many times someone can be beaten by their partner before they suffer post-traumatic stress disorder and their whole family suffers. A tsunami of mental health illness is costing us billions of dollars, and it is

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costing us lives. We actually have ways of addressing this, but we need not chuck more money at the problem, although the money is very acceptable, lovely and great—we need to change the way we think. We need innovation. We need to think of new ways of fixing old problems, because what we are doing right now is simply not working.

Both sides of the house have set their minds to this and done the best they can. I take exception, however, to the Liberal Party, which rejected the idea of decriminalising cannabis because of law and order. By making something illegal—it is a word—it becomes illicit. We could make red hats illegal, with people wearing red hats being banned. We could then direct police to take everyone wearing a red hat and incarcerate them. We could do that; it would be very stupid of course. Police would be charging around finding people hiding their red hats to put them into prison. How do members think the police would feel about being called upon to serve an inappropriate law? It is so with cannabis. We deliberately allow them to chase after a problem that really is not a problem. Alcohol? By all means. This is an example of how we have asked our police force to do what they should not have to do. As a result, what happens, as one of the police officers in California said, “Now the population hates us because we are chasing after things that the population does not find objectionable.” In fact, we have actually caused part of the problem within our police force and we have to address this.

I look with great pleasure at the fact that the Therapeutic Good Administration has now allowed psilocybin and MDMA for use as a treatment for depression and PTSD, but—and there is a but here—it has made it almost impossible to access. Our police officers, our serving armed forces and veterans who have retired from their forces with their terrible burdens are not going to get access to a treatment that research would suggest can give, on average, an 85 per cent chance of a cure within six months. Why have we done that? Why? There is no medical reason for that. The treatments currently being suggested for treating our police officers suffering with PTSD simply do not work. We have eight to nine suicides every day in Australia. That is 3 000 people a year killing themselves. I put that if a large proportion of these people were treated with the newer innovative medications, they would not be killing themselves and the families of the survivors would not be suffering their nightmares and the self-criticism of what more they could have done for their loved one. A burden of disease is going through our communities that we are basically causing. I will go on now. Chucking money at the problem is not the solution. It is not the answer. It is helpful, but we need to think differently.

Because we are stuck thinking in the past, we have to think with new vision, new innovation, and here, of course, I will speak about hemp. Balancing the iron ore industry is going to be fundamental. Being vassal to another country that buys our product is not going to support us in the long run if it decides to take an aggressive action against us, as we have recently seen with the wine, lobster and grain industries. We are subject to a foreign country. It would be far better to allow us to build an innovative industry that people calculate is measured in billions of dollars of profit for our state, with new developments making new structures, developing a science that could make us leaders in the world as well as giving us financial security, which would allow us to then afford more hospitals to pay for more doctors, and to remunerate our police officers appropriately. It would give us security in our boundaries and borders, and raise our standard of living. It would be nice to be the innovator in the world. It would be nice to lead the world rather than follow on years or decades behind other researchers.

I lead on to speak about the distress we are currently feeling in our society. It has been mentioned before: people are suffering and people are crying out. Mortgages are going up and people are having difficulty deciding whether to pay for food or transport to keep a roof over their heads. It is indisputable. We have all heard this and are surely suffering it ourselves. Grocery bills have increased. Hunger, which is already an issue in our society, is now becoming worse. We are seeing food insecurity. We cannot allow this to carry on. It is our job to serve the people of the state. I will go into my main point. I will not take too much time. My main point is that the status quo is our enemy. We are not going to benefit by doing more of the same. We have to do things differently. We have to allow ourselves to think new thoughts and find new ways, to develop and use society—if you like.

One of the problems that I am seeing as a lowly crossbencher is the difficulty of getting people to move to new thinking. Not being aware of how the government really works, because I have not actually been in government, I understand that one of the problems that we are facing is the inability to move things forward. The people in the background, our bureaucrats, are the ones keeping things in the status quo. Change is always difficult. Forcing change through when your own job is being shifted every couple of years, as opposed to someone who is there on a permanent basis, can be very difficult. I would ask that both sides of the house, whether in government or waiting to be in government, make an attempt to move away from the concept that the status quo is anything but our enemy. We need to think differently and make more with the money that we have.

I can tell the chamber from personal experience in the wheatbelt that a lot of the money for the development of the hospital was spent on inessential stuff, such as getting architects to fly in six times that were then still unable to put a door one side or the other of a light. It went right down the middle—stupidity there. It blocks the access for nurses and makes it more difficult to access patients. This was actually planned in advance. I went into a facility

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where the emergency bell, should I have been attacked, was not reachable, and the door when I finally reached it, was not openable —

Hon Dan Caddy: It has to be at the same time.

Hon Dr BRIAN WALKER: Indeed! It was not reachable. I could not open the door because it would come inside. A patient could easily block that door. The whole thing was just untenable. Someone planned that with government money—our money! The money from our pockets and taxes have paid someone to do an inefficient job. That is unacceptable. At all levels, we need to be aware that this is not to be tolerated. The efficiency of our government needs to be underpinned by our ability to find new and better ways of doing things with the same money.

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [3.02 pm]: I understand that Hon Tjorn Sibma is out on urgent parliamentary business, but I just have to bring this to your attention, Deputy President. It was astounding to see the member stand there with such a straight face and talk about rail. It was very astounding for him to talk about delivering projects as well. On 5 October, Hon Tjorn Sibma wrote a piece in *The West Australian*. It was about rewriting history. In that piece, Hon Tjorn Sibma managed to rewrite his own history for his party as well. It was quite interesting. He wrote a lot about the plan to run the airport line down the Tonkin Highway. There was lots of fuss and issues. Hon Tjorn Sibma clearly did not realise that this was the exact route released by the Public Transport Authority in September 2012. It was the route that the WA Liberals took to the election in 2013. Unbelievable! He was out there slamming this government about something that they took to the election in 2013.

Not only did they take it to the election, they said that it was fully funded, costed and business cased. It turns out that when the Liberals got in in 2013, it was not fully funded. There was no money there to spend. It was just simply a pipedream by the WA Liberal Party once again. Without a doubt, this is another sign of why the WA Liberals cannot be trusted with finances. It always ends badly.

I will say this, I listened closely to Hon Stephen Dawson and Hon Darren West and I did not hear anything about being “peachy” in the community. I am very suspicious about where that came from, because that is not what I heard from those two members. It was about getting on with the job and delivering for Western Australians. We understand how hard it is. Hon Darren West touched on the cost of living stuff that we have been putting in place as a government. It is a bit slanderous to use the term “peachy”, which the Labor members did not use during their contributions.

Hello, Hon Tjorn Sibma. The member has just missed a beautiful speech on a nice article that he wrote on 5 October!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order, members. I am now required to offer the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [3.04 pm] — in reply: Thank you, Deputy President. What a great debate today. Can I suggest that despite all the protestations from those opposite, particularly in the gallery over here, these debates can become a bit repetitive. It is interesting that not only was everyone keen to participate, but we could not actually get to all the members who wanted to make a contribution. I thought that was probably a good prospect. For all the complaints of the deputy leader, there are actually debates that inspire a bit of activity, so that is good.

Hon Stephen Dawson: Are we hearing that you might bring this one back again in a few weeks?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Well, unless it lifts its performance in government, it is our intent.

I thank the members who contributed; the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the Legislative Council, my good friend Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Darren West, Hon Peter Collier, Hon Dr Brian Walker —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Members, the Leader of the Opposition is the closest member to me, and I cannot hear him.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is very unusual actually, for me not to be heard. I thank Hon Kyle McGinn for his short contribution. I also recognise the intent of Hon Neil Thomson and Hon Dan Caddy to make contributions as well. It was a popular debate—as it usually is when we comment upon the performance of the government.

Let us run through the defences that the government has. They are usually always the same. What I am doing when I bring these debates is giving the deputy leader an opportunity to actually answer some of the questions and come up with some solutions or guidance—whatever it is. It is usually the same. The first defence is that the iron ore price is volatile. I heard that several times today from several members of the government. The iron ore price does move around, but you know what we are talking about —

Hon Stephen Dawson: You probably said it, too!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes. I have probably said it, too. Do members know what we are talking about when we are having these debates? We are talking about the money that the government already has in the bank. We are talking about the money that is already in the money bin. We are retrospectively looking at all the money that has

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been rolling in over the past years. We are looking at money that the government already has. We are not telling the government how to spend the money that it is going to get in the future. We have been talking about all of the money it already has! Hon Darren West mentioned the farming prospects and he is right, it is all cash he has already got from the crops that he has planted. The money is already in the bank. It is in the money bin and the Premier is playing Scrooge McDuck with it. We are not talking about what is going on in the future. We are actually debating money that the government already has. Their first defence falls flat, as it always does.

Their second defence is the classic defence of this government: the previous conservative government was no good.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I think the defence is that there is no money bin. It is spent!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is in the money bin! It is a hidden bin. The second defence is that the previous —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: — government did not do the job that they thought it should have done. It blamed the previous government. I have got some news. Government members might want to take note of this. Something recently happened: it turned to 2023. There was a new year. We are talking about the itinerary of 2023. As of 2023, the Labor Party has been in government for a number of years. It has been responsible for fiscal management for a term and a half—six years. It is about time that the government stopped using that as their only defence: “Look what they did!” We are actually asking the government to step up and look at its performance. We are trying to debate with the government on how to make things better.

As I have made clear every time, there are some good bits about what the government has done, but it cannot live off its reputation around COVID forever. The government has to start lifting its performance in other areas. That is at the centre of this debate. If the Labor Party has not figured that out, if it has not worked out that it is 2023, we might need to put up a big calendar somewhere. It is now 2023, people! It is time for the government to accept that these things are its responsibility.

Hon Stephen Dawson: We don’t take our marching orders from you. We take them from the WA public.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: We will keep working on that. It is 2023, the government has to stop blaming the past and start living today and do a proper job for the future because that is what the people of Western Australia expect.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy President casting his vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (10)

Hon Martin Aldridge
Hon Peter Collier
Hon Donna Faragher

Hon Nick Goiran
Hon James Hayward
Hon Tjorn Sibma

Hon Dr Steve Thomas
Hon Neil Thomson
Hon Wilson Tucker

Hon Colin de Grussa (*Teller*)

Noes (20)

Hon Klara Andric
Hon Dan Caddy
Hon Stephen Dawson
Hon Kate Doust
Hon Sue Ellery

Hon Lorna Harper
Hon Jackie Jarvis
Hon Ayor Makur Chuot
Hon Kyle McGinn
Hon Shelley Payne

Hon Stephen Pratt
Hon Martin Pritchard
Hon Samantha Rowe
Hon Rosie Sahanna
Hon Matthew Swinbourn

Hon Dr Sally Talbot
Hon Dr Brian Walker
Hon Darren West
Hon Pierre Yang
Hon Peter Foster (*Teller*)

Pair

Hon Steve Martin

Hon Sandra Carr

Question thus negatived.