

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Ms Libby Mettam; Acting Speaker; Mr Peter Rundle; Deputy Speaker; Ms Merome Beard; Mr Dave Kelly; Ms Simone McGurk; Ms Jessica Shaw

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## COST OF LIVING

### *Motion*

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government's failure to address the rising crises across multiple portfolios, including the failure to respond to the pressures impacting Western Australian households, despite sitting on a massive \$6 billion surplus.

I note that this is the last private members' business motion that the opposition will debate for the 2022 parliamentary year. It is with regret that the opposition cannot in good conscience applaud or even commend the performance of the McGowan Labor government over the past 12 months. As we said in question time today, this week is always an opportunity for ministers, the opposition and other members of Parliament to reflect on the year that was. We have seen a number of ministers jump up and answer Dorothy Dixers about what they see as their achievements. If people read only their side of the contribution without delving into some of the challenges that we know about and continue to raise in Parliament, and also have conversations about with various organisations and representatives in our community, they would think that everything was going swimmingly. However, I am disappointed to say—we have raised it on more than one occasion—that this government is failing on the bare basics. When it comes to health, housing, education and relieving the cost-of-living pressures that so many in our communities are facing, this government is failing.

This government is sitting on a \$6 billion surplus. It is also becoming increasingly arrogant in the way that it dismisses people and organisations and ideas that have not originated from the government, and the Premier in particular. If an organisation finds itself on the opposite side of the ledger and it is not doing one of those projects that government members love to talk about, it will be in the wilderness. In the case of the discussion we have been having in question time over the past two weeks about the very esteemed and respected Professor Fiona Stanley, she has been diminished and sidelined and her integrity has been attacked by no less than the Premier.

That, to me, is a sign of an arrogant Premier who has started to disconnect from the community and also the values that I assume a Labor government would purport to bring to government. Rather than use the massive majority that was gifted by the Western Australian people at the election in 2021, this government has not shown restraint in exercising the power it has. There was no better example of that than at the beginning of last year when we saw the decision to introduce the electoral reform legislation to rip regional representation from the state's Parliament. The first act of this government in its second term was to diminish regional representation in the state's Parliament.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Shame!

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** It is a shame, Leader of the Liberal Party. It was done under the guise of an expert task force that was whipped up in no time at all and had a very short time frame for submissions. The legislation appeared and was debated and passed, and everyone patted themselves on the back, while a broad majority of the community was left to wonder how we got to this point, given that the Premier had said again and again that he would not contemplate introducing legislation of that nature. It was a disgrace. That legislation will fundamentally change the way that people living in regional Western Australia are represented in this Parliament after the next state election. It will diminish their voice. It will make it easier for the government to ignore the plight of those communities that are out of sight and, therefore, out of mind.

It is a scary prospect for those of us who represent and work and live in those communities. It is concerning because, as we have seen, this Labor government has become more and more adept at ignoring inconvenient truths and ignoring the issues that are being raised that do not fit with its agenda and instead making big, flashy announcements. Not one regional member of the Labor Party spoke on behalf of their community about what the government was doing to electoral representation. They missed that opportunity. When we go to the next election and we remind everybody that Labor members have changed the way that their voice will be heard in Parliament, I think those regional members will be regretful. It will be to their own detriment and to the detriment of the communities that they represent.

When we get to 2025, some serious thought will have to be given to how we make sure that we do not lose the value of the Legislative Council, because it does add value. It is not supposed to be a rubber stamp for the Legislative Assembly and the executive government. That is not the purpose of the Legislative Council. It should provide a different lens for consideration of legislation. I reiterate my disappointment. We hoped dearly that the government started in a way that it would not continue with and that the election result would be the high-water mark for, I would think, a century.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

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**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** At least those on this side of the Parliament would hope so, Minister for Water. Unfortunately, the way that the government has made decisions across every portfolio and applied itself with arrogance using its numbers has resulted in poor outcomes, and I will get to those as I go through my contribution.

For the second year in a row, the government has also presided over a massive budget surplus of \$6 billion. It is an extraordinary amount for the Treasurer to have in his back pocket. Make no mistake, this government is flush with cash. Government members will say that it was prudent financial management. We will say that it was extraordinary returns from the mining industry, a GST deal that has fundamentally underscored our ability to get a fair return from the commonwealth and significant tax collections over the last two years that have bolstered the bottom line. The government is sitting on a massive surplus. Surely that would mean that within each portfolio, the systems would be humming and infrastructure would be where it needs to be and we would not be facing some of the challenges that we see written about in the paper and hear talked about on the radio and raised by the opposition in Parliament every day. We would expect that, with a \$6 billion surplus, the wheels of government would be turning and that the challenges would be being addressed. I can only imagine what we would have given to have a \$6 billion surplus when we were in government and we were facing an extraordinary number of people coming across the border to assist with the enormous boom in the mining sector from 2006 to 2009. What would we have given for that?

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Too busy building all those hospitals.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** We did; we built hospitals.

As I travel throughout the state, this budget surplus is one of the things that people raise with me on a regular basis. People from households that have had to tighten the purse strings, struggling to pay the bills and the car registration and put food on the table, cannot understand why more levers are not being pulled by the government to assist them. As our government has become more and more wealthy, a portion of the population has become less and less wealthy. That is extraordinary in a state like Western Australia, with our abundance of natural resources and our amazing quality of life. Under this government, more and more people are struggling simply to keep a roof over their head and pay their bills.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** The government is too busy squirrelling it away in special purpose accounts in readiness for the next election.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** That is exactly right.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Which special purpose accounts are you talking about?

**Dr D.J. Honey:** You've got about 20 of them.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Yes. Which ones?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** The Leader of the Opposition has the call, not the member for Cottesloe or the Minister for Water.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** The Leader of the Liberal Party makes a good point. In budget estimates we explored the numerous special purpose accounts that exist and the challenge of determining where the money is flowing and what the government is using it for. The government is trying to make it look like it has less of a surplus. It is embarrassing for ministers and members of the government to front up to people in their communities who cannot afford to put fuel in the car and keep a roof over their heads while the government has a \$6 billion surplus—likely greater than that.

Members opposite do not need to take our word for it; we would not expect them to. They just need to look to the reports of the Western Australian Council of Social Service, Foodbank and Anglicare or talk to grassroots organisations such as the Albany Community Foundation. That foundation has created a rent assistance fund to support people to stay in their houses so that we do not have more and more people jumping across to the social housing list. We know that list has blown out extraordinarily. Local organisations that work in the service sector, as part of the Albany Community Foundation, have come together in a first to create a fund to support people. They are seeing more and more people coming through the doors of their organisations, struggling to make ends meet. It is an alarming trend. I met with people from that foundation in Albany the other day, when I was down there for the show and various other events, and they were genuinely concerned. Those cost-of-living pressures are resulting in more and more households having to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table.

We talk about the cost of fuel and the challenges that people face. I have no doubt that the government will say, "Look at what we have done in creating new zones for public transport and free travel. That is reducing the pressure." That is right, but, in the same breath, I would invite whoever responds to this motion to address the fact that we have not seen a corresponding increase in the Country Age Pension Fuel Card for people on fixed incomes in regional communities, where there is limited or no public transport. Neither has there been an increase in the patient assisted travel scheme. That has needed to be addressed for some time and yet for six years the government has refused to

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do so. They are things that this government has at its fingertips. Those changes could be implemented right now to make life easier for people who are struggling with the cost of living.

I met with WACOSS the other day for a briefing on what it was asking for in next year's state budget. In its report, WACOSS noted that the Salvation Army had reported a 90 per cent increase in requests for assistance to pay car registration, and I understand that both UnitingCare and Anglicare have seen a commensurate increase in the number of people coming through their doors. The opposition is regularly told by those opposite that we cannot contribute solutions to some of these challenges. As part of our response to the budget this year, we asked the government to freeze fees and charges within its remit—not forever, but to allow people to catch up—yet the Treasurer and his ministers were tone deaf to those requests. The cost of car registration and drivers' licences continues to go up. Power and water bills continue to go up. The government has fees and charges at its fingertips and it refuses to relieve that pressure, even for a short period. The opposition will continue to say that, with a \$6 billion surplus, the government can afford to give households a chance to catch up.

I note WACOSS also asked for a rental relief payment. In the context of the Minister for Housing being unable to deliver the houses he continually promises, I think keeping people in the houses they have would be a sensible solution in the short term. As an opposition, the Liberal and National Parties have not yet considered the proposal, but we will go through what WACOSS has asked for and the other pre-budget submissions. I do not think it is an unreasonable ask to keep as many people as possible in the houses that they have to prevent them from landing on the social housing list or becoming homeless. As we know from the statistics, the Minister for Housing is not able to deliver on his commitments. These crises are becoming everyday business-as-usual occurrences for a government with \$6 billion in its back pocket. The Premier, as Treasurer, could provide this relief through the midyear review process, and it would be a very welcome announcement for the people who are facing a pretty bleak Christmas and holiday period, trying to keep food on the table. We are not holding our breath, though. I think the Treasurer is more likely to take his lead from the Grinch and continue to hoard the \$6 billion surplus while too many Western Australians suffer.

Reflecting on the issues we have raised in questions, matters of public interest and private members' business motions over the course of the year, I want to briefly touch on some of the key areas that we have covered. The shadow portfolio ministers will go into greater detail. Without doubt one of those areas is the health portfolio, and I commend the shadow Minister for Health for her efforts. It has been a rich vein for the opposition to mine, because there are so many challenges in our health system. We hit record ambulance ramping at the beginning of November, which is an outrageous statistic for such a wealthy state. It is a problem of the government's own making because it failed to invest when it came to government; in fact, it pulled back on operational funding. As a consequence, and compounded by the COVID pandemic, we are now seeing the need for an enormous amount of catch-up. It is seriously concerning that we have seen service reductions in hospitals, particularly in regional Western Australia. We have unprecedented levels of ambulance ramping in the metropolitan area and service reductions in hospitals across regional Western Australia.

Member for Agricultural Region and now shadow minister for regional health, Hon Martin Aldridge, asked a question in the Legislative Council the other day about the reduction in operating hours at Wyndham Hospital since October 2021 and the closure of maternity services, as the member for North West Central and the member for Vasse have raised on a number of occasions. That prompted him to ask whether there had been any other facilities at which services had ceased or been suspended. Disappointingly, there had been a number of them. They had been suspended in Carnarvon, and the minister, in response to the question by the member for North West Central today, was unable to provide a time line for when those services would return. In Narrogin, there had been short periods of reduced services in non-emergency birthing, limited because of GPs being on leave. That happened for approximately eight days in November and has now returned to normal. At Bridgetown and Warren Hospitals, there were short periods of reduced birthing services due to a limited number of GPs and GPs being on leave. That was for approximately 16 days in total, non-continuous, between July and June, and those services have now returned. Unfortunately, the services have not been returned in Wyndham. If there is an emergency after hours, there is an on-call facility, but no-one at the hospital. People have to call someone and they have to get there to pick them up. Wyndham is without 24/7 emergency care for people who walk through the doors of the hospital. No time line was provided on whether that would return to normal at any point.

They are just a few of the examples in regional Western Australia that the opposition finds seriously concerning. This is much like the issue the member for Vasse raised in relation to Margaret River Hospital. Despite the WA Country Health Service identifying it as a priority hospital that needs investment, we are still waiting for an investment decision by this government. It needs mental health services, upgrades to the emergency department, additional GPs and air-conditioning upgrades, but none of that has been done, despite the department recommending that that was a priority. That is unacceptable. I listened to the Minister for Health's answer in question time today about all these projects, but there is no glory in that. There are some serious challenges, not the least of which is the ongoing dispute

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with nurses and midwives that has spiralled out of control. No doubt that is in part the result of this government taking so long to come to the party with an appropriate offer. All I can say is that our nurses and midwives deserve better pay and better conditions. That is quite simple, and it is the view of the broader public as well. It is remarkable that in a state flush with funds, the government has been so miserly as it negotiates with that sector; it needs to do better. Ministers and members of the government stand in this place week after week, lauding frontline workers, as we all should, but it is entirely hypocritical when they are dragged along to then provide a fair offer for pay and conditions out of their \$6 billion surplus. It is unconscionable to stand and talk about the commitment of these workers, but then not be prepared to put an offer on the table that would recognise that work.

Regardless of COVID-19, the warning flags were up and waving in advance of the pandemic. Ambulance ramping was already on the rise, and that was the canary in the coalmine. When we add the Auditor General chiming in with concerns around key issues in the portfolio, including the report that was handed down in November on the management of long-stay patients in public hospitals, there are serious issues for the Minister for Health to attend to.

I turn to the housing crisis. Housing has not improved over the past year. There has been announcement after announcement by the minister, but very little hitting the ground. As we have said before in this house, we have a Minister for Housing with no houses. That housing shortage is putting enormous pressure on not only the social housing sector and the community housing sector, but also businesses that seek to attract and retain staff. The shadow Minister for International Education today raised concerns about how Western Australia will attract back international students and retain them in Western Australia when housing shortages are impacting our ability to do that. We have raised concerns around the status of nurses' accommodation. I was pleased the Minister for Health conceded that the state of nurses' accommodation in regional Western Australia was not up to scratch. We look forward to her rectifying that situation and hope that investment is forthcoming because that is having an impact on the ability to attract and retain nurses in regional areas.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** And their safety.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** Without a doubt, Leader of the Liberal Party—and their safety. I have reflected in this house previously about nurses who have heeded the call from government and returned from retirement and gone bush because they have operated out there before and they were happy to do it, but they have been attacked and felt so unsafe in their accommodation and in the hospital that they will not return. That is unacceptable.

Questions from the member for Moore in late October this year show that very little progress has been made in building or purchasing stock for social housing. Let us not forget that this government sold 1 300 social houses when it came to government. According to the answer that was provided by the minister on 27 October—I will be the member for Central Wheatbelt first—just four houses have been built in the wheatbelt and four from the on-the-spot purchase market. That is a total of eight in the entire wheatbelt region. In the goldfields, just two houses were built and two purchased. In the great southern, just two houses were built and 23 were purchased. Only five were built in the East Kimberley and eight in the West Kimberley. When it comes to the social housing economic recovery package new build grants and funding allocated to the community housing sector, I could not even find the wheatbelt on the list. There are big gaps in what is being delivered and what is being talked about by this minister. As the Leader of the Opposition, I am appalled by the lack of progress the government has made on dealing with the social housing backlog. As the member for Central Wheatbelt, I ask simply why the wheatbelt does not deserve investment and why there is a black hole for community housing and building new houses because there is certainly a demand there. The minister needs to come clean on why he is failing to reduce the wait time for public housing, because there is clearly a difference between what he is promising and what is being delivered.

I return to what the Western Australian Council of Social Service is putting forward as part of its pre-budget submission for the upcoming state budget to reduce rental stress and to keep people off the social housing list. That is a very important point to consider, whether it is Government Regional Officers' Housing, social housing, community housing or transitional housing. Another matter that was raised with me when I was in Albany—I am interested to know whether the minister can confirm this—is that transitional housing was available in Albany for prisoners who were coming out of prison and transitioning back into the community. That housing was pulled back into the social housing pool and it is now very challenging for those prisoners who are transitioning back into the community to find accommodation. I thought that one of the elements to success was that once they leave prison, they need at least a roof over their heads to ensure that they can start contributing to society again. It is robbing Peter to pay Paul. I do not understand. Perhaps the minister can clarify whether that intel is correct because it was raised by a number of people in the sector who deal with those individuals trying to successfully transition back into the community. It is an enormous mess in that portfolio.

I have spoken before about our record when we were in government and that we had a significant investment into GROH when we first came to government in 2008–09. That is because very limited work had been done on upgrading properties for police and teachers across the regions. When I travel around my electorate, and also across the state,

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I ask councils whether they are in a position to partner with government to deliver some of the houses that they desperately need because that is the model the government has continued with. It will not build the houses itself; it prefers someone else to do it. A lot of local governments, particularly the smaller ones, cannot do this because it impacts their ratios. They get adverse reports because the balance is not right for the rates they take in. Although they know that it is critical to be able to attract a principal or a policeman to their community, they also do not have the funds at their disposal to do that any longer, even with a contract with the government. There is a need to relook at how that is done from a state government perspective to ensure that the government is building appropriate GRO housing and is not reliant on local governments or the private sector. It is certainly a challenge and one that I see reflected across my electorate, but more broadly than that when I travel in regional Western Australia.

It was interesting that for all the government's fanfare around infrastructure investment—we heard a little bit of it today during question time—a roundtable discussion was held. Representatives of regional chambers of commerce, the Property Council of Australia, the Civil Contractors Federation WA and the Western Roads Federation talked about supply chain infrastructure pressure points. Quite a comprehensive report was published in *Business News Western Australia* of 29 November. In particular, I draw members' attention to the comments from the Civil Contractors Federation WA. This is the second conversation I have had about this issue in the last two weeks. From the federation's perspective, the problem this year is that contractors working on suburban land developments are struggling to get their hands on enough limestone blocks to keep up with demand. That is a very specific problem. When we were in government, access to limestone for sustainable development was part of the strategic assessment of the Perth and Peel regions, or SAPPR, as it was known, to make sure planning was aligned with environmental offsets and agencies. If new water pipelines needed to be put in, it was all done together to limit pipeline corridors and things like that. It was to ensure that all the assessments were done. As Minister for Water; Forestry, there was a particularly contentious pinch point with the pine plantations. The pine plantations were impacting the water and we had environmental issues around Carnaby's black-cockatoos. All these issues were put into the mix instead of doing things piecemeal across the Perth and Peel regions with the intent of taking a more strategic approach.

I have not seen hide nor hair of that process continuing under this government. In fact, I think it has been abandoned. It was raised with me in the context of a different conversation, but it was supported by at least the private sector because it had clarity around where offsets would occur. For instance, the Civil Contractors Federation would say the issue with limestone is a challenge to delivering infrastructure.

Kitty Prodonovich, who would be very familiar to everyone, is the CEO of the Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry of WA. She commented —

“The cost of doing business is escalating, it's up there with lack of housing and lack of people as issues in the regions,” ...

Another concern was inconsistent power supply.

That is something we have raised on numerous occasions in this Parliament. The article continues —

“There are massive power issues particularly in the Wheatbelt,” Ms Prodonovich said.

The article goes on to talk about something that I am very interested in. This government came to power and created a conglomeration of portfolios in megadepartments with the promise that there would be better decision-making and alignment between portfolios that need to work together. Ms Prodonovich observed at this meeting that she had encountered a lack of coordination within government agencies. For instance, there have been times when she had received multiple emails from people within one department seeking her input on policy issues. Kwinana Industries Council director Chris Oughton said —

... the view from industry is that the relevant departments with a management function over the industrial area are not working well together,” ...

“They are not integrated, not holistic enough, and the infighting between the departments is confounding issue resolution.

That sentiment is repeated throughout this article. The question is whether the creation of these departments that caused so much disruption at the beginning of the McGowan government's term is really delivering better and more streamlined processes when it comes to the delivery of infrastructure, industrial estates, planning and environmental offsets. Certainly, a number of issues are canvassed in this article on the round table held the other day.

Industrial land has become another infrastructure pressure point for WA. Although the focus is on a number of industrial estates, particularly around Collie, there is a diminishing amount of industrial land in Perth and we have low vacancy rates for industrial land across the metropolitan area. A number of industrial estates in regional communities still do not have basic infrastructure, which does not make it attractive for industry to invest. It is very difficult to get across the hurdles to business investment. Whether it is residential or business development in industrial estates or

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our town sites, this government could do better on headworks. That issue gets raised with me on a regular basis. Again, the opposition has put forward a headworks fund, which both Labor and Liberal–National governments in the past have supported. It would certainly assist in deconstraining land, providing opportunities outside the metropolitan area and encouraging business to invest in industrial estates currently sitting idle. There is opportunity there for this government with its significant surplus to invest. Property Council Australia WA CEO Sandra Brewer raised this issue. She called for assistance on headworks. I point to the fact that the opposition has been calling for that since the budget this year, at least. We think it is a very sensible way to deconstrain land and support industry.

Before I wrap up, I want to very briefly talk about royalties for regions. The substitutions that have occurred mean that the program is in a diminished form compared with what it was. There is not a day when I am travelling throughout regional Western Australia that people who are visiting the regions or have been part of that transformation do not tell me that they lament the fact there is no way to access that funding under the McGowan Labor government to drive development and support committees in regional Western Australia. It has simply disappeared. But for a very small number of discretionary funds, it is wholly allocated and there is no real decision-making at a local level. When there are initiatives that could assist communities dealing with some of the challenges that we see across the regions, people have no capacity to access government to have those conversations. It is very disappointing that this government continues to keep the banner up but for all intents and purposes has removed royalties for regions funding and what it could achieve for our regional communities.

The last issue I want to touch on before I pass on to my colleagues to go through their portfolios in detail is youth justice. This portfolio is one of the most vexing things we have seen the government deal with over the course of the last 12 months. The way that the Premier has responded to the issues with Banksia Hill Detention Centre and the dysfunction, crime and antisocial behaviours in our communities has reached new levels of arrogance. He believes that he knows better than experts, professionals and people with lived experience. He is playing on the fears of the broader community, enforcing stereotypes of juvenile offenders and ignoring community leaders. It seems like there has been a shift in the way that each side of politics talks about this issue at the moment. I imagine some very uncomfortable conversations are happening in the Labor Party behind the scenes. All I want to say is that I am not deaf to the challenges faced by our community and the people who have been victims of these crimes. When people raise this issue with me and say that I sound like I am apologising for wanting there to be no consequences for these young people, I tell them the system is not working and all we are doing is teaching them how to be better little criminals and then letting them loose back in our communities so they can do it all over again, and they could not possibly endorse that. At no point in time has the opposition said that there should not be consequences for people's actions, some of which are serious. But the way this Premier has handled this issue has been appalling, as was his attack on Professor Fiona Stanley and those who were invited at the very last minute to attend a summit that he clearly had no intention of paying any heed to. There were no minutes, no listening and no record—and now it is a war of words. There is an inconvenience to the truths that Fiona Stanley and the others who attended the meeting are saying that do not align with the government's priorities. Frankly, the government does not want its priorities to be derailed by having to deal with such complex issues. It is not good enough. The Premier does not want to derail the good news juggernaut that he and his team of hundreds of media operators behind the scenes keep churning out every day by having to deal with a very complex issue.

I understand that it is easier to say, "If you do a bad thing, you get locked up", but I have stood in this chamber and listened to people on the other side of the house talk about how we need nuance, compassion and understanding. There could be a little bit more of that coming from the Premier on this issue. You can be tough on crime, but in the end, you are not tough if it just generates a revolving door for our juvenile detention centre. That does not solve the problem. Offenders become better equipped at offending, and that does not keep the community safe.

The failure of the government to invest in support for child protection and the Department of Communities so that they offer a contemporary and timely service means that too many kids fall through the cracks. I was appalled when the Minister for Community Services told the member for North West Central not to worry because people can call the after-hours hotline when kids are out of control. Once again, the police are the people of last resort who have to pick these kids up off the streets. People can call the hotline! That is just not good enough. It is a disgrace that the Minister for Police is not advocating for his ministerial colleagues to lift their game so police officers are not left to deal with this problem. It is an intolerable situation. The Minister for Police continues to say that there is no crime problem in Carnarvon. That flies in the face of what that community is living through at this time, as well as those in communities in Newman, Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek. These are complex issues—we understand that—but there is an arrogance in the way the Premier chooses to ignore people with that lived experience and leaders in those communities who are asking for assistance to provide solutions.

On that matter, when the summit was being talked about, the newly installed police commissioner was reported as saying that he was looking forward to sharing exactly what his police officers had to deal with out on the streets—the dysfunction and criminal behaviour of young people running through our streets. We will never know exactly

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what he said because in the Premier's office, they do not take minutes in meetings. That became apparent today in question time. We will never know what the police commissioner said in that meeting because there is no formal record. To me, that was an extraordinary statement. The Premier knew the summit would be reported on and followed with keen interest, yet no-one took a formal or official record of that meeting. How that played out over the following days is beyond a disgrace. It is not a surprise, because the Premier's arrogance has reached an all-time high.

I will leave it to individual portfolio holders to go through in more detail some of the issues that we see on which the government could improve or do better. I put it in the context of the fact that we have \$6 billion in the bank. The government has an enormous majority in this Parliament. The government has many backbench foot soldiers who can reach out into the community, so it should have no excuse for not gauging public sentiment and the challenges in multiple portfolios. It seems that the government is at loggerheads with too many really critical parts of our public service and our community. It is at loggerheads with the nurses and midwives, and at loggerheads with police. I suspect the Premier cannot wait for the summer break when the government can refresh that portfolio and put a new face on it, but you can't put lipstick on a pig, so it will not change because the Premier will still be there and that arrogance is seeping through the entire cabinet. That failure to invest in basic services and infrastructure in the early days of the Premier's government is creating a rod for his back now, and there does not seem to be a plan in any aspect to deal with that.

In opposition, we have worked to highlight the areas in which we think the government can do better. We do this under extraordinary circumstances. We are not asking for sympathy, but midway through this term of government, it is time to reflect on what this government could be doing better, and there is no shortage of issues that we have raised over the last 12 months.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [4.44 pm]: I rise to enthusiastically join the debate commenced by the Leader of the Opposition. In the same spirit that the Leader of the Opposition started her debate, it would be good if I were struggling to find material to use to suggest that this government could do better. Unfortunately, I am overwhelmed by material on the many failures of this government. Despite its ascendant majority and its enormous surplus, it is failing on so many fronts. Here it is; it should be a mature government six years into its term. In fact, it is flailing around like a government that has just come into power and not dealing with issues adequately. It is mismanagement across a number of areas. It is mismanagement of key portfolio areas, as was outlined by the Leader of the Opposition. It is not adequately progressing state development. It has an ideological agenda that undermines good government decisions and is making questionable decisions that do not serve the public interest. Perhaps this is the hallmark of this government above everything else. It is not even called a Labor government anymore, members might note. It is not the McGowan Labor government; it is the McGowan government. We have a personality cult, which apparently is the government these days, based purely on the Premier, who does not believe in Labor anymore. Clearly, other members opposite also do not, although I am sure some good ones do.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister for Water, order!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We have a personality cult based on the Premier—the McGowan government. The hallmark of the McGowan government is an utter and total lack of transparency. I say quite confidently that this is the least transparent government in the history of the state of Western Australia, and we have had some dodgy Labor governments in the past. This government's lack of transparency is absolutely profound.

If we go to the management of the key functions in the state, first and foremost is keeping people safe in health. I will not go through the health failures because the shadow Minister for Health will do that very adequately.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister for Water, that is quite enough!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Minister for Water, I had the courtesy to not interject, and I will not interject on the minister if he actually rises, and I would appreciate the same from him because we have so much to get through.

The member for Vasse, the shadow Minister for Health, will cover health in some detail. This government was handed a health system with the capacity to deal with the health needs of this state, but we have seen a massive decline in the quality of health services in the state. This is no more exemplified than by the fivefold increase effectively in bed-blocking, which causes ambulance ramping outside our hospitals. What an absolute disgrace! I will not dwell on that.

Let us go to energy—one of my favourite topics. What a debacle! We see more puffing of the chest than in most places, but what an absolute debacle this government is causing in that space. The government talks about managing an energy transition, but it is managing chaos. The Shepherd review encapsulated this. I will not go

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through yesterday's debate in detail, but I will comment on it. A quote from the Shepherd report about reviewing the data of outages states —

This data shows over a four-year period a 'materially' worsening customer outage experience trend in CBD and rural areas, with flat performance in urban areas.

That was the summary of the review that the minister initiated himself because we consistently see a range of problems in this area.

I want to talk about the debate we had yesterday; I want to put on record how disappointed I was with the contribution of the member for Swan Hills. We are all used to the minister claiming to be a victim and telling everyone how clever he is, how hard he works and how no-one works as hard as him, but it is the same broken record. I suspect the Leader of the Opposition and I have probably heard it in this chamber for a decade or more; nevertheless, we all know the minister is very clever and how hard he works and how no-one lives up to his standard!

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Sarcasm doesn't work in *Hansard*.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes. These are just the sanctimonious, gratuitous indulgences of the minister in his reply. I worked with the member for Swan Hills on the Economics and Industry Standing Committee and I hold the ability of the member in some high regard. When I saw the announcement about Fiona Hick becoming the new CEO of Fortescue Metals Group, I thought that she was in that same league of capability and capacity, but instead, her contribution was reduced to repeating gratuitous criticisms and insults from other people, rather than actually using her intellect and ability to respond meaningfully to the issues that were raised.

**Ms J.J. Shaw** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Acting Speaker, I have a lot of material to get through.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills! You have had your say. Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is a big disappointment.

What a debacle we have in energy in this state! What are we facing? We face a coal shortage for our power stations in Collie. In fact, three power plants have had to be switched off for an extended period of time to buy stocks. We also have the ludicrous situation of exporting coal jobs from Collie to the eastern states. We will have 100 000 tonne of coal shipped into this state from Newcastle. Who knows how long that will go on? I think my reputé is likely the case: it will cost \$400 a tonne. Again, the minister will not be transparent about the impact that will have or who will pay for it. The government has made no mention of that. The minister says it is complex because of the calorific value and the ash content—rubbish! I have been a manager responsible for a power station.

**Ms J.J. Shaw:** You wouldn't know it!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Member for Swan Hills, as I said, you are wasted in this place. Maybe you should try somewhere else. Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** We do not need it! Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. What an absolute farce! Despite a likely reserve of somewhere around two billion tonnes of coal and 300 million tonnes or so of provable, mineable reserves in that place, we have to import coal from the eastern states.

Furthermore, this government is looking at the coal closure in 2030. It can dwell on the policy that our party had going into the last election, but the Labor Party is now in government and it has made this decision. I do my homework on these things. People who actually use the gas have done an analysis of the government's policy. It shows consistently that if we rely on gas to provide the confirming capacity on days when there is no wind and the coal-fired power station is not operating, the demand for gas will be something like 300 terajoules above the capacity the current Dampier to Bunbury natural gas pipeline can handle. There has been no announcement from this government around what it is doing and how it is working with the owners of that to get more looping in that network to get that down. That could be up to a 300-terajoule gap!

**Ms J.J. Shaw** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The member for Swan Hills can go away and do her own modelling in her own time.

Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Ms L. METTAM:** Point of order!

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** Member for Swan Hills, if you carry on like this, I will start calling you to order. Leader of the Liberal Party.



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*Debate Resumed*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. If the government provides the confirming capacity with an average of 150 terajoules of gas across those days when there is no wind and those coal-fired power stations are closed, there will be an enormous shortfall in the gas supply. I will be absolutely delighted for the member for Swan Hills, who I assume is here as the proxy for the Minister for Energy, to provide some answers on that. We can see the fragility of this system. Yesterday, the Minister for Energy came into this place and, when I asked him a question about the Santos plant and the reduction in output from Santos through Varanus Island, he said that there will be no impact on customers or business. The very next day, our largest ammonia manufacturing plant in the state, the Yara plant on the Burrup Peninsula shut down because it did not have enough gas from Santos. A major industrial facility shut down because it did not have sufficient gas. That is the fragility of our gas network and that is the fragility of the ability —

**Ms J.J. Shaw** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills, I call you to order for the first time. I have been pretty lenient with you, given that I think that the Leader of the Liberal Party has invited some interjections from you, but I make myself clear. You spoke while I was speaking last and while I was taking a point of order; it is not acceptable. I call you to order for the first time. Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. That demonstrates the fragility of our system. We have constraints on capacity and gas users in the state of Western Australia are extremely concerned about the government's ability to get gas down that pipeline when it is relying on that to provide the backup when there is no wind and we have no coal-fired power stations.

I will not go through it all but let us look at transport under this government. We are six years in and the only thing that has been delivered as part of the famed Metronet project is a project that was started by the previous Liberal government—the Forrestfield–Airport link. Otherwise, there have been lots of announcements. If announcements could move people around, we would have no problems. There are lots of hard hats and fluoro vests, but we have a government that is simply not delivering those projects in anywhere near the time or on the schedule that it should. The government is competing for labour with the private sector. I think the Leader of the Opposition alluded to this; the government is out there competing with the private sector so that, at a time when the private sector is struggling for labour, the government can come in and make more announcements about infrastructure projects to compete with it. It is one of the reasons we cannot get houses built on time.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** It is all right. Take a seat, Leader of the Liberal Party. Member for Burns Beach and Minister for Water, I do not need you to make up for the member for Swan Hills. If you can, just keep it down. Leader of the Liberal Party.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

The government is competing. On top of the projects that it cannot deliver because it is years behind and tens—in fact, hundreds—of millions of dollars over budget, as was revealed by the Auditor General in her review of the top projects, the government has announced even more projects. It now has the Midland line closure, which has already been pushed back. We know it will be pushed back again. It will be gold for the next election because that whole corridor will be in chaos during the next state election because the government will push it back. The government has added another project on top of it and is competing for labour with the private sector even more; that is one of the primary reasons we do not have sufficient labour in those other areas.

Planning in this state is absolute chaos. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the good job she did of highlighting the issues. We have a planning minister who has utterly abandoned an audit planning framework in this state. I will have a chance to go through that in more detail tomorrow morning in my grievance to the minister on this subject. We have a process that is utterly idiosyncratic. Singular decisions are made without any reference to ordered planning. The recent debacle with the Charles Street decision exemplifies that more than anything else. The planning system is designed to ingratiate the government with developers who want to develop whatever they want whenever they want, and is utterly abandoning local communities.

The Leader of the Opposition has taken us through the issue of housing and homelessness. The government's response to that issue has been a massive disappointment. This government has still not replaced the 1 300 social houses that it sold when it first came into office. I will be fascinated to hear whether any government members can confound me on that. There have been about 20 different announcements about the government's Common Ground project, yet that project is no closer to completion today than it was six years ago.

I now turn to the fascinating area of law and order. I want to cover this in a bit of detail. The Minister for Police comes into this chamber and says, "Everything's fine. Everything's great. I'm going to lots of police graduations."

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I can tell members that he must be going to quite a few resignation parties as well. There has been a record number of resignations from the Western Australia Police Force under this minister and this government. Despite the record number of graduations, the number of police officers has started to go down.

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am not seeking interjections from this crowd, thank you very much, Deputy Speaker.

**Mr M.J. Folkard** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Leader of the Liberal Party. Member for Burns Beach, thank you.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is what we are seeing under this police minister. I want to go through some facts. Members on that side do not like facts.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr M.J. Folkard** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Burns Beach, I call you for the first time.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** As I said, members opposite do not care about facts, but I will go through a few.

The number of non-family-related assaults has gone up in some regional suburbs. I am sure that the excellent new member for North West Central will cover these issues in good detail when she has the chance to do so. In Carnarvon, the number of non-family-related assaults has gone up by 80 per cent in the last 12 months. Despite that, the Minister for Police has come into this place and told us that the crime rate is improving. In the overall midwest and Gascoyne region, the number of non-family-related assaults has gone up by 28 per cent in the last 12 months. The number of burglaries has also gone up by the same amount. The number of cars stolen has increased by over 50 per cent because of the horrendous TikTok craze of young people stealing cars and putting up the footage. A crime crisis is occurring in the majority of the regional centres located north of Geraldton.

[Member's time extended.]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** It has been revealed by my colleague Hon Peter Collier, the shadow Minister for Police in the other place, that this year there have been more than 400 resignations from the police force. This was two months ago, so we will find out the real number soon. The attrition rate is almost double the rate in 2021 and almost treble the attrition rate in 2020.

Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Deputy Speaker, there is a constant stream of interjections on the Leader of the Liberal Party. It is making it very difficult.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Roe. I shall not uphold that point of order, but, members, can you keep it down so that the member can be heard and Hansard can correctly record what is being said.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker.

As I have said, the resignation rate is almost treble the rate of previous years. The number of senior officers who are leaving is even more concerning. In 2019, only one officer who had served for less than a year resigned. In 2022, that number had increased to 29. In 2019, the number of officers with six to 10 years' service who resigned was 24. In 2022, that number had increased to 103. In 2019, the number of officers with 10 years' service or more who resigned was 37. This year, that number has increased to 111. That is the record of this government. The Minister for Police can talk about the number of graduations that he has gone to. I admire those young people who want to go into the police force, but it is clear from the number of resignations that there is a culture problem. Everyone would know that those young officers will struggle to have the impact that they could have when senior officers are leaving the force. As at 30 June this year, there were 7 007 sworn officers. That is up only 80 from the previous year. By 20 September, that number had dropped by nearly 100 to 6 911. So much for the much vaunted increase in the number of police officers. The government is now repeating history by trying to get recruits from overseas. We have heard about how many people have applied. I will be fascinated to hear how many of those will get here, and how many of them will be able to find somewhere to live. At best, we will probably end up with a break-even situation. The challenge with the new protected entertainment precincts legislation that has gone through the other place and will become law is that no police officers have been allocated to enforce that legislation. I hope the Minister for Police will spend his time wisely by working out how to deal with that issue, and also with the other criminal issues in this state.

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One of the things we know about this police minister is that he loves being in a photo with guns. I have discussed this with the Speaker already. Here is a pretty important press release with a photo of the minister showing the Premier what a gun looks like. Here is another photo of the police minister with a gun. Here is another photo of the police minister showing us how a gel blaster can look like a gun. If we reported the number of times the Minister for Police has said the words “guns” and “bikies” in this place, it would dominate a large percentage of the contributions that he has made in this place. Make no mistake: although law and order is important, and dealing with bikies and making sure that we do not have gun crime in this place is important, the reality is that in the great majority of this state we are not seeing the impact on law and order that we should be seeing. The incidence of violent crime—the most serious crime in this state—has gone up by around 20 per cent under this minister. That is the record of this government. Members opposite do not like numbers. They can have all the happy shots that they want with guns and all the salacious headlines that they want around bikies and the like, and that may be important, but that is not dealing with the crime issues that the state of Western Australia is facing.

I turn now to state development. The Leader of the Opposition touched on this. The government is completely failing to grasp the new hydrogen economy that we should be well down the path of embarking upon. What has happened in this state? The single largest hydrogen investor in Australia, Fortescue Future Industries, has gone anywhere but Western Australia. That is because that company cannot get an adequate amount of industrial land from this government. I want to reinforce the point made by the Leader of the Opposition that the failure of this government to provide adequate industrial land is the single largest handbrake on the future development of those industries in this state. I drove past the Oakajee estate a few weeks ago. I think the driveway has been graded. Some polties must have driven up there for another announcement and they could not get their four-wheel drives up the driveway. The grading of the driveway is all there is. I have heard a lot of announcements about the much vaunted hydrogen precinct. Recently, I was talking to a proponent from one of the companies that had put in an expression of interest, and when I asked him whether he was thinking of doing anything at Oakajee, he said not really, because there is nothing there. There is no infrastructure, no power connection into the south west interconnected system, no gas, no water and no communications, and the company cannot afford it. It wants to get its foot on the ground, but the reality is that until the government makes meaningful investment in that estate, nothing is going to happen there. The government is creeping towards it. It was so concerned about trying to score a point over our energy policy in the last election that it is desperate not to build the 330-kilovolt line that would connect Three Springs back into the south west interconnected system. In fact, that is one of the critical enablers that will have to go ahead before that estate will be developed. The member for Swan Hills can roll her head back all she likes, but that is the reality. Here we are, six years into the term of this government, and all the government has managed to do is a partial grading of the driveway. This government is failing on industrial development.

The critical shortage of industrial land on the Kwinana–Rockingham industrial strip is another major handbrake. That is the area where most people want to build their facilities because the workforce and the infrastructure is there, yet the government has not freed up more land. There is an ideal opportunity to repurpose land in Latitude 32 for that purpose. Fortescue Future Industries and others cannot develop in this state. There are some developments planned. There is talk of a hydrogen hub and the like, but that is still some way off. We are missing the boat on the largescale development of hydrogen. We should be leading the world; instead, we are the laggard of Australia. That is the fault of this government.

We have seen appalling decisions made by this government. It shut down the forestry industry—6 000 jobs in a critical area of the south west —

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Six thousand jobs! Where did you get that figure from?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** There were 6 000 jobs that were dependent on forestry.

Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Once again, I cannot hear the Leader of the Liberal Party.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Roe. Members, please do not interject.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** For purely ideological reasons, a ludicrous proposition was put forward in this chamber that this decision was somehow about dealing with climate change, when anyone who looks at the science knows that a well-managed forest industry is the best way to get active carbon sequestration through a forest.

**Ms C.M. Rowe:** Oh, my God! Where are you getting this information?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s fourth assessment report—go and read it! I have given the member the reference; she should go and read it and then we can talk about it.

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The government has shut down the forest industry and attacked fishers in this state. Where has that bold initiative around managing the fisheries disappeared to? It disappeared in a puff of smoke once the fishers got active in that area. The government has followed through with a heap of other restrictions.

The government has made questionable decisions that do not serve the public interest. We have seen a good range of those, none more so than the Midland Landgate sale, which I will be able to highlight only briefly. What an absolute disgrace that was! What an absolute embezzlement of public money in a completely incompetent sale. Let us hope the sale of that property was just incompetence. As each piece of information on that deal comes out, it looks worse for this government. The government should hang its head in shame about that. It is something that I will not forget. I will get every agency that I can to pursue that deal, because it was an utter waste of public money. It is unfortunate that I do not have time to go through all the detail of that. There was also the ridiculous decision to move the agriculture department out of its offices and to rent offices when it had a perfectly good building and perfectly good land. Goodness knows why that decision was made.

We do not see transparency and accountability from this government. I will say again and again that the ultimate failure of this government will be that it has been the least transparent government in the history of Western Australia. My freedom of information requests typically come back almost as a black page.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe)** [5.13 pm]: I also look forward to contributing today on the motion from the Leader of the Opposition that condemns the McGowan Labor government for failing to address crises across multiple portfolios. That is what I would like to concentrate on today. The two portfolios that I will concentrate on are agriculture and education. I want to look at it in the context of the way in which this government operates. The cartoon in today's *The West Australian* shows one minister saying —

Moody says... “The state recorded excellent revenue growth and improved revenue diversity through successful management of the pandemic, combined with sustained spending discipline ...

Then the other minister says, “What does that mean?” The Premier, who is leaning back in his chair, then says —

It means ... we dug up half of WA and nobody got a pay rise!

That describes what is going on in this state. It describes the way that people are starting to feel about some of the measures this government is taking. The Leader of the Opposition summed it up very well. Of course, the Leader of the Liberal Party also covered some elements.

I would like to focus on the agriculture portfolio, which is very close to my heart, as is education, for which I am the shadow minister. I am quite disturbed by some developments in the education portfolio. I go back to the first function that I went to when I was elected in 2017, which was held just north of Kojonup. To her credit, the Minister for Agriculture and Food; Regional Development acknowledged me as a new member. The meeting was about land conservation and it had got together quite a few of the people around Kojonup, but the minister proceeded to talk about the blue on green wars! I do not know whether that was to educate me about what goes on, but agriculture seemed to disappear off the map for quite a bit of her address and the focus was on the blue on green wars—Liberal versus Nationals. I think the people in the room were left scratching their heads.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Did she talk about cow horns and manure?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** She did not, but we were there to talk about agriculture. That was my introduction —

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Was she explaining the budget cuts to the ag department by the previous government?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** No, she did not focus on anything of that nature; it was the blue on green wars, minister.

Many people in the agriculture industry rejoiced when it was announced in November that the Minister for Agriculture and Food was finally hanging up her boots. I will say that many people had a sense of optimism in 2017, having looked at her past performance as Minister for Transport and her role in the Mandurah rail line. They were optimistic that she would show the same tenacity in the agriculture industry. After five years of failing to support one of the most valuable industries in WA, the minister has let down almost every branch of agriculture and failed to deliver key projects to build the industry and provide the direction it rightly deserves. The one comment I would make for the next minister, whomever that might be, is that they should focus on mainstream agriculture. It is an \$11 billion industry. The new minister should focus on mainstream agriculture; that is the advice I would give any new minister coming in. We have over 20 million tonnes of grain coming in this harvest. We still have 13 million sheep in Western Australia and we need to make sure that we focus on keeping the sheep flock numbers right up there. The minister has had 26 years of parliamentary service and 13 years in the ministries of three Labor governments, and is the longest serving female minister in WA's history, so I want to congratulate her on a long and remarkable career. However, I think it is time for a change.

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I guess the worry for me is who will come next. Who will be the next agriculture minister, or will it be an agriculture and regional development minister? The Leader of the Opposition spoke about this. We have mega-departments that have evolved in this term of government and they are not working. I will talk about that a little bit more shortly. I want to focus on some of the failures we have seen in agriculture in this term of government and over the last five years. In the Premier's media release on 7 November, the minister was showered with praise and tributes. The rest of Western Australia has been wondering how a minister so disconnected from her portfolio was allowed to remain in it for so long. A statement in the media from the agriculture minister in July 2022 does not shy away from self-promotion. It reads —

“I will be proud that we have rebuilt the R&D capability in the department, that we've invested in biosecurity, that we have put in place programs that support those farmers that really want to do progressive things around climate change, to really deal with these headwinds that agriculture will face into the future.

We need not look far to see the commentary from the agricultural sector that highlights the many failures of the term. I want to give members a sense of what people in the ag industry feel like. Some of the quotes that have come through from *Farm Weekly* include —

Unfortunately, the first three years of this effort have been blurred in bringing together three completely different departments under the one single agency. Not only did it lead to a very unhappy department according to an internal union poll, but farmers, fishers and country people had no idea what the new department was focused on, or what, if anything it was capable of focusing on.

Further —

The agricultural sector in particular has been confused and frustrated and questioned if agriculture exists in its own right any more within this mega department, or is it so irrelevant that it is just a bit player supporting new niche products like hemp and pseudo sciences like regen agriculture.

Further —

Farmers have questioned where the big wins for grains and livestock are. Notably the previous government invested over \$300m into the Seizing the Opportunity programs.

... But so far we have seen no evidence that the ALP is interested in supporting agriculture or regional development in any big way.

Those three paragraphs give a sample of the way people in the ag industry are feeling. Then we had the minister's efforts on biosecurity and the comments she reportedly made to a journalist around the impact of foot-and-mouth disease. She said it would be “costly and unfortunate” but would “not see all of the cattle industry decimated” and that she “would not say it would be catastrophic”. She reportedly said that if the disease landed in Western Australia, it might make domestic milk and meat cheaper. Of course, that led to our two peak farming bodies in Western Australia, the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and WAFarmers, calling for her resignation. In July 2022, Tony Seabrook was quoted as saying —

“She hasn't had the confidence of the sector for a long time, and this is largely due to the fact she's brought all her own views and opinions to the job” ...

But he said there was no other MP in the McGowan government that he could see filling the agriculture portfolio.

That is a concern for the agriculture industry in general. In November 2022, Trevor Whittington said —

One hopes that the next Minister won't set themselves up to fail like this one, by promising to fix the old Ag department's budgetary problems, or career off on a solo mission to regenerate the state's soils (while ignoring salt), or throwing money at farmers to convince them to sign up to carbon farming when it is uneconomic to do so.

These are feelings out there in the ag sector. I want to quote Trevor Whittington further because he has done a lot of research into some of the claims by this government about increasing investment in the agricultural department and putting on more FTEs, saying “Look at all the good work we've done!” He has looked at some of the figures that paint the true picture. I quote —

Post the 2017 election win, the first budget of the McGowan government was 2017–18 which had DPIRD allocated \$186m for the Delivery of Services.

If we look at the most recent budget which goes out to 2025–26, the last year of forward estimates, the Delivery of Services is set to grow by \$3m to \$189m which in real terms after 8 years of inflation adds up to a cut of around 20%.

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... departmental staff numbers have been cut ...

Total cost of services over the 8 years fell from the budgeted \$528m ... to \$513m in 2021–22 and then falling off the cliff to just \$396m in 2025–26 ...

That is an example of smoke and mirrors sometimes when it comes to this government about all the fantastic spending it is doing on FTEs and the agriculture department in general. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about royalties for regions, and I will go on to that in a second.

I found quite disturbing an article from John Hassell, president of WAFarmers, titled “Overdue Correspondence.” He said —

MINISTER before you go any chance you could answer this letter from February, if nothing else it will help clarify questions around DPIRD’s funding ...

He goes on to talk about a variation of points, including how they are happy to correct anything that has been put in there, which the minister may disagree with or come up with better figures to dispute. He continues —

In relation to the recent article “The Sinking Ship—HMAS DPIRD” I stand by the premise that since the Machinery of Government changes, the Department has suffered a loss of senior management who had both agricultural science qualifications and experience in broadacre agriculture.

This, combined with the loss of all the Royalties for Regions funding that underwrote many research and development projects, plus budgetary cuts, has left the Department both demoralised and unable to deliver core services. See the Auditor General’s Report ...

That is what I am trying to get to because, basically \$800 million a year of royalties for regions funding has been ripped out of the department, which included around \$50 million a year in projects supporting agriculture research and another \$50 million supporting things like mobile towers. The minister has overseen serious cuts. When we look at regional development, under the previous government, we had nine quality regional development commissions. The Leader of the Opposition is well and truly aware of this. As the Leader of the Opposition spoke about earlier, it was about local decision-making. Local boards of the development commissions made local decisions about their areas and they knew what was needed. We had \$1 billion a year in royalties for regions, which put out quality projects and added to the amenity and liveability in the regions. I am looking at somewhere like Esperance: \$22 million was allocated to the Esperance foreshore, \$10 million to Esperance Primary School, \$14 million for the residential college and \$20 million for Esperance Hospital. All those amounts were quality spends from royalties for regions funding. Now what do we have? We have Water Corporation subsidies and the running of the orange school bus service. That is what this government has done to royalties for regions.

I do not know whether we will have a combined agriculture and regional development minister or whether the member for Bunbury, with his history as a former CEO of the South West Development Commission, will be the new Minister for Regional Development. Maybe he will take on that portfolio and someone with a background and experience in the agriculture industry will be the new ag minister. I certainly look forward to seeing what the Premier comes up with in his reshuffle.

I want to run through a few quick points about the education and training scenario. The most disturbing thing to me is the way that the minister has taken this command-and-control attitude. The minister has said that she will not run at the next election. The minister has readily admitted that she is in the departure lounge. We have unrest out there in the State School Teachers’ Union of WA about teacher shortages. Many teachers, principals and deputy principals are telling me that they are not being supported. As I said, the control-and-command attitude is quite upsetting to many in the world of education. The Premier’s cabinet reshuffle will be an ideal opportunity for him to have another look at this area. I hope the minister’s union affiliation will not keep her there as the minister for the next two years. We want someone who will regenerate the education system.

I only have to go back to December 2017, when the minister announced \$64 million in cuts to education funding and she threatened to axe the Schools of the Air, shut down school camps, close the residential colleges in Moora and Northam, remove funding from the Landsdale school, close Tuart College, double the VacSwim fees, cut funding for gifted and talented students, move Perth Modern School to a high-rise building and, to top it off, cut funding for the boarding away from home allowance, which was probably the biggest insult to the families and students out there. I know that the member for North West Central is very familiar with the Schools of the Air. I think that, in some ways, that was probably the finest hour of the previous member for North West Central, who led the campaign to ensure that the people of Western Australia understood how important the Schools of the Air were. To top it off, the government proposed to cut 170 jobs, including 70 teaching positions.

[Member’s time extended.]

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**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** How ironic is it that the government is now crying out for teachers and wondering how it can get a teacher in front of every class? The campaign by the former member for North West Central brought the Schools of the Air to light. All members of the National and Liberal Parties went out there and put their best foot forward, and we saw the backflip from the Premier and the minister. That is probably what set the minister off on the wrong pathway.

There is a lack of support for our principals, deputy principals and staff. Twenty-five per cent of graduate teachers leave within five years. We are seeing climbing violence statistics. In 2021, 1 400 incidents against a school principal or deputy were reported and there were 1 060 incidents against staff involving a weapon or a physical object, which was up from 661 in 2017. Speaking of violence, last week I spoke about the threats of physical violence against our teachers in Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek in the north of the state. No wonder our teachers are leaving. They are not being protected properly. I think the Leader of the Liberal Party spoke about the situation with police. They are trying; I will give them that, and we recognise that. But this government needs to look at housing, security and many other issues to retain our teachers.

I want to quote a couple of paragraphs from a speech by Pat Byrne from the State School Teachers' Union of WA. She said —

What we do know is that politics will ensure that the minister will be able to truthfully say there is a teacher in front of every class in February next year—schools and colleges. We of course know that that will be achieved by some classes being cut; teachers teaching out of area; teachers losing internal relief; and a greater reliance on remote and online learning programs.

...

At this very moment we have a Western Australian Labor government with the largest majority in WA's history ... coupled with its strongest ever economic balance sheet actually shrinking the percentage of funding public schools get and leaving them short of the minimum school resource standard.

That was the president of the State School Teachers' Union, which is affiliated with the Labor government, coming out with the truth. That is what we are worried about. I think our education minister needs to take heed of that. The country teaching incentives program that was announced the other day is a start. I congratulate the minister for that. We are getting feedback about the people who will get the incentive for going out to the regions and remote areas, but there is no clarity about the teachers, principals and deputies who are there at the moment. We need some answers about that point. It is just about impossible to find anything on the Department of Education website.

Finally, I want to back up the comments of the Leader of the Opposition about the arrogance of the Premier. What we have seen develop over the last few days with Professor Fiona Stanley has been quite upsetting to many people in Western Australia. We saw the article in yesterday's newspaper and we read about the disappointment she felt after meeting with the Premier. We have seen the Premier's arrogance come through in his attitude in question time over the last couple of days. He needs to go home over Christmas and reflect on changing his arrogant attitude and have a bit of a think about humility. He needs to think about the definition of humility. He needs to think about coming back into Parliament in the new year with some humility, because the people of Western Australia are starting to wake up. The people of Western Australia certainly understand that he has no humility whatsoever.

I look forward to the reshuffle. I look forward to a new ag minister and a new regional development minister. I certainly look forward to someone like the member for Swan Hills, who understands the energy portfolio, coming in as the new Minister for Energy and making some real change for the better. I look forward to a good reshuffle and a good refreshment, with some quality ministers coming in.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.38 pm]: I rise to support the motion. I clearly will be speaking from a regional perspective. I have been in this house for only a short time, but I have lived in the regions for a very long time, so I have lived experience of some of the challenges and issues that we are facing and I have a lot of understanding of the frustrations coming out of the regions. Some of the things that are very important to the people who live north of Perth are not being actioned.

Regional development surely relies on the retention of regional populations, and many deficits and shortfalls are putting roadblocks and barriers in place. A lot of these towns are emptying out. Why would people live there? The costs are going up and people cannot get a house. In many towns, crime is driving people out. People cannot see a pathway forward. The regions have a lot to offer. I think we all know that the regions provide a large amount of economic support for the rest of the state, through mining, tourism and agriculture. Those industries and businesses are enormously important to our state, and the people who live in these regions need support and for those places to be vibrant and liveable.

As I have said before in my very few addresses, people in the regions do not expect underground railways or massive stadiums like Optus Stadium or anything like that, but they do expect basic services and facilities so they have

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a reason to stay there. Perth is a long way from anywhere in the north. I understand the difficulty of people getting their head around what it is like to live in a small town, compared with a suburb of Perth. Five thousand people is a big town; that is not even as big as a suburb. It is hard to get that across. Some of the frustration in the north is most definitely about appearing to not be heard. That is coming through loud and strong for me.

Without the ongoing development of key infrastructure and services in the regions—as I say, it is not just about having an Optus Stadium—there will be a decline across the regions, and these towns are needed to support the things that are coming. The tourism that is being promoted is probably not being supported right now with the infrastructure that is needed.

An example is the hospitals. Meekatharra Hospital and Tom Price Hospital are still in the pipeline. They support really rich regions, with a lot of people travelling through those towns. I was at Paraburdoo Hospital the other day, and there was scaffolding in the hallway. That hospital is a conduit; anyone who needs to fly out with the Royal Flying Doctor Service has to go through that hospital.

Keeping the infrastructure alive and as it should be is really important to those areas, as are the maternity services. They are critical for retaining families and people in these towns. I was pleased today when the minister responded to my question by saying that all people who travel to have a baby will have their costs covered. A girl told me recently that five weeks away cost her \$9 000 in accommodation, at \$250 a night. That is a lot of money, and not many people can afford that kind of cost. That was a pleasing thing to hear from the minister today, as was the fact that people will be able to access Perth or Geraldton. Some people have family in Perth or they can compromise and stay with someone. If they are not remunerated in any way through the patient assisted travel scheme, it becomes extremely difficult, and people make life-changing decisions, such as leaving town, for these kinds of reasons.

On the patient assisted travel scheme, I have heard people in this place saying, “You didn’t do this”, and, “We did that.” Whatever that might look like, the reality now is that where we are today is a lot different from where we were two, four or five years ago. I pay \$2.85 a litre for fuel in Tom Price. The Country Age Pension Fuel Card is not keeping up with the cost. Seniors are having to cancel medical trips to Perth because they cannot afford them. They are putting off surgery and whatever else they can. It is the same with the \$100 a night accommodation allowance. I have been travelling down here, and it is pretty hard to find somewhere to stay for \$100 a night. On a pension, it is extremely difficult. People are telling me that it is an exceptionally tough ask for them to travel under their own steam.

This touches on the topic of women in the regions, which is no different from women anywhere, but that is my shadow portfolio. Access to breast screening is crucially important. It crops up all the time. Yalgoo, for example, has been told that it is too small to receive the breast-screening bus. A lot of people and places out there, including a lot of Indigenous communities, really need it. Unless there is a bus, people will not go, and that is concerning. I hope that when the breast-screening agreement comes up next time, the smaller towns that have been missing out will also be included.

Stopping domestic violence is at the top of my agenda. In a lot of towns, women’s refuges are full. Transitional housing is needed to transition women out of refuges, where they can stay for a maximum of three months. That was the case for the one I last spoke to. After that, there is nowhere for them to go; there is no other housing. Some form of transitional housing is needed to get them out of the women’s refuge and to give them the confidence to go back into the community.

Coupled with that are mental health concerns. Poor mental health is becoming a massive issue. We are seeing it increasingly throughout towns, especially with the crime in the north west. Victims of crime really need mental health care. I had a flood of text messages last week from a person I was extremely worried about. In the middle of the night, he sent me a text message saying, “Please! This can’t go on. I can’t deal with this anymore. I have just had my front window smashed again.” He is old and lives on his own. That just does not happen in the suburbs. It does happen down here, but not on the scale that it is happening in the north. That is a real concern for victims of crime and needs addressing.

Another issue that crops up regularly throughout the regions is specialist services. Perth is 1 000 kilometres from Carnarvon, 1 500 kilometres from Exmouth and so on further north. The lack of regular specialist services has been a bugbear for a lot of people. The need for renal dialysis is increasing, and the number of people waiting for it is high. Many people are living in Perth, away from their families, waiting for a chair. A person said to me last week, “I’ve got to wait for someone to die before I can have a chair in my own town.” That is causing a lot of angst within the regions, and I understand it is the same across Western Australia.

Another problem is general staff shortages across the regions. Obviously, that is the same across the state; it is across the world at the moment, I guess. Really remote places rely on limited staffing. The member for Roe raised the incentives for teachers to travel. I spoke with someone from Cue. Members of the Cue community are concerned about their teachers not getting the same incentives as the surrounding towns. There is nowhere nearby they can



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source teachers from. If the priority is to go to neighbouring towns, Cue will end up with no teachers. These are some of the things that are causing issues for people in the smaller and really isolated towns.

A lot of the issues the regions face are interrelated. The need for robust health services flows on throughout the regions. It needs to stay at the forefront. Cyclone Seroja highlighted the need for these services. It could have been disastrous in terms of people losing their lives. Nearly two years on, Kalbarri is still suffering a large amount of destruction. The infrastructure deficits are huge. It is going to take a long time to rebuild; we all know that. The assistance took a very long time to arrive, and, as I understand, only a small amount of money has been acquitted so far, which is disappointing.

I will come back to infrastructure. The solar eclipse is looming, and I know a lot of people in the north are nervous. The focus has very much been on Exmouth, but a lot of the surrounding towns are fully booked. People are really concerned about how the towns are going to hold up. They are more than happy to welcome everyone into the town, but a lot of the infrastructure really struggled during the Wander out Yonder campaign, and there are definitely areas that need to be fixed. I urge the government to consider taking this opportunity to help, through small business grants, those not-for-profit organisations and clubs. A lot of clubs could do with a barbecue or an upgrade to their ablution block. The bowling club, or whatever it might be, could see potentially thousands of people descend on it and rely on it for food and events in the area. It will leave a legacy for those towns, which is something they rely on.

The limited workers' accommodation, which has been an ongoing saga and has not moved quickly, is another issue that towns are struggling with. I am sure that those in Exmouth will not mind me saying that when I went through there, every second or third house in one street had one or two caravans. A tent was pitched in a lady's undercroft and she said, "Don't mind that; that's my son's bedroom." He had a brand new tent and a brand new mattress. He is a fly-in fly-out worker and he had lost his rental to Airbnb or to someone who had taken it back. She said that was the issue people face when they try to staff their businesses. The lack of accommodation will be enormously exacerbated with the solar eclipse in 2023. A lot of people throughout the region will reap big rewards for their homes during that time, which is great on one hand, but it will create a lot of issues on the other. That highlights the need to keep up and keep the infrastructure improvements happening continually because without them, once the foot goes on the hose, it is very difficult to build back up. Royalties for regions, which the Leader of the Opposition touched on, made a significant difference to our lives in the north, but that was just the start. There is a long way to go.

I turn now to my biggest bugbear, crime, which I have left until last. At the outset I would like to say that I would like people to acknowledge that crime now is not like it has ever been. I returned to the north west 20 years ago after having been born there and I have never, ever seen it this bad. I have never seen it like this. It is absolutely terrible. It is upsetting to come in here and feel as though I am being batted away and to be told, "No, it's okay. You're bagging out the police." I am not bagging out the police. I speak to the police every day. There are very competent and great serving police. They are struggling. They are frustrated as well. From where I stand, in no way will this ever be anything against the police; they are amazing. What they are struggling with is the gravity of this. A lot of the towns, including Meekatharra, are in the same situation. Someone told me that during the election they were stuck in the Mt Magnet hall because kids were smashing rocks through the back window and they could not get out. This is not normal; it should not happen. The same thing is happening in the schools. Local kids are going to school and they are going into lockdown. They are not kids who come from dysfunctional homes. It is not helping to retain people in our regions and it is getting to crisis point. We had a 12-year-old write to the Premier in desperation a year ago. She told her mother, "He won't write back to me", and she told her to give it a go. She received a vanilla message back from someone else. I hope that highlights to members that this is the level we have got to.

This week alone a teacher in my region had his car stolen and trashed. He is an amazing teacher. He is involved in the community and he plays football there, but he will be leaving. The kids that he has looked after took his car. The supermarkets have been going crazy. A security guard is in hospital because a 12-year-old child assaulted him. Someone had a spear go through their front door just after they had been standing there. It is believed it was projected by a spear gun. It was a security door, mind you. Thankfully he moved. This week another person was taken to hospital because he was assaulted by an intruder. He was very, very lucky.

I put on the record, yet again, that there will be a tragedy and we need to do something. My point here is that I fully understand the situation at Banksia Hill Detention Centre, but I would like people to understand that it is not mutually exclusive, because at the back end of that is what is happening on our streets up north. That is actually what is happening.

I will bore members with another story. I crossed the road the other day and I heard a noise that sounded like a gunshot. I went out the front of our pub and walked across the road to find 10 to 13 kids running away. They had punched a massive hole in the window. The alarm went off and I rang the lady who owns the store. She was beside herself because it is the third or fourth store it has happened to. The kid was about 10 years old. He was surrounded by a group of about 12. None of those kids are the ones who were seen. The Minister for Police said that I needed to report it as an incident. I mentioned that to the police and their comment was, "No, Mem, we're not going to

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take that because we will take an incident report only if it is a crime.” I do not believe the statistics of what is really happening on the ground are coming through. There is no-one out and about. This was one o’clock in the morning and I spent two hours consoling people in the main street. A confrontation could have happened because there were cars of people and yelling—all sorts of things happening. Fortunately, it was fine, but my point is that we need someone to understand this.

I have raised safeSPACE previously. It was mentioned yesterday that money was put into the police and community youth centre. My understanding from people ringing me is that it is closed and no programs are happening at the moment through the PCYC. We have a massive problem on the streets and it seems that the facility is not being fully utilised for whatever reason; I am not sure what that is. The police officers who come at 2.00 am and 3.00 am—whenever we call them in the morning—say that they need somewhere to take those kids. Those 13 kids who were running around cannot be taken home. The police have taken them home.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Ms M. BEARD:** This is why I stand up and say that we need safeSPACE. Geraldton is very lucky. As the minister explained to me, it has safeSPACE there. It is 500 kilometres away. That is of no help to us. I urge the government to please take heed of this. The Premier referred to the chat fest and the conversations. I do not see it as a chat fest; I see it as an essential. I would love to be in that conversation because I believe there are people on the ground who can bring a lot to what is happening. People do not call a hotline; and, if they do, it is not being utilised. I followed up on that when the minister said to let him know if it was not being used. The feedback I have had is that the hotline is not being used. They get no response from it—nothing actually happens.

I emphasise that the crime needs urgent attention. The fear for those who live in Carnarvon is that Banksia Hill often releases a lot of those children back out around Christmas time. It happens every year. Incidents occur over Christmas because more kids are around and they come back for the holidays. It gets out of control. There is a group on the street right now. If the numbers drop in Banksia Hill, that is fantastic. We do not want the numbers to go back up again because these kids-in-waiting who are swirling around will be the next generation who go through the doors of Banksia Hill. We need to find a way for that not to happen. It must be a collaborative effort. I know there are police and there are communities, but in this instance I do not think they are mutually exclusive. I think they need each other. It has got to desperation point and my biggest fear is that there will be a tragedy. We had two near tragedies this week. If it is going to happen, it will be when there are more people in town at Christmas time, when all sorts of things are going on. I do not know how many more times I can say this. It is paramount. Leaders in the community are frustrated. They need help. They are asking for help. It seems from where they are sitting that their calls for help are being ignored. There is a disconnect between the reality of what should be happening and what is happening. People on the ground say that the 24/7 hotline is not happening.

There needs to be a conversation. If that is not going to happen, I hope that we are here after Christmas without a tragedy having occurred. It is getting very close and I think we need to find a way forward. One of my criticisms is that for the past two years our community has been feeding through information that has been brought to the house and we have not seen any change. There has been no change at all. I understand that programs are in place, such as Target 120. They are not making a difference. My main criticism is that we need something to happen and we need it to happen quickly, whatever that might be. That has not occurred and people feel as though they have been ignored for a very long time.

**MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water)** [5.59 pm]: I rise to respond to the motion. The Leader of the Opposition couched this debate as an opportunity to reflect on 2022. She went on to raise a number of issues. I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party of a few things. When I think about 2022, I remember the continual hysteria from the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party about the government’s management of the pandemic. We had all that stuff with Clive Palmer. The opposition supported him rather than the government through the years of the pandemic. We made a decision to open the border, but because Omicron was going crazy on the east coast, we deferred the opening until March 2022.

The opposition had not learnt its lesson. Rather than listening to the science and responding in a respectful way, it went absolutely crazy and accused the government and the Premier of breaking a promise because we said we were going to open the border but we did not. Again, members opposite said we had broken the trust and spirit of Western Australians. Ultimately, in February the decision was made to open the border when our vaccination rates were higher. Look at the performance of the state since then. We have done so much better throughout 2022, both economically and socially, and our hospital system has responded because of decisions we made around the pandemic. In my view, that was the defining moment of 2022.

The opposition was absolutely slaughtered in the 2021 election because of its mismanagement of COVID and its support for Clive Palmer. Then 2022 came around, and despite being reduced to a rump, when the crunch time came to make important decisions in the best interests of the state, the opposition was back to being critical of whatever

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the government was doing around the pandemic. Instead of coming on board and making decisions in the best interests of the state, again, the opposition was critical. Opposition members really have not learnt a thing.

The opposition raised some issues today. The trouble with opposition members, whether they are from the National Party or the Liberal Party, is that we really cannot rely on anything that they say in here. We cannot take anything on face value. That is because they do not do the work or get their facts right and they make things up as they go. I am glad the Leader of the Liberal Party is back in the chamber. He said in his contribution that the government has stopped the logging industry and lost 6 000 jobs in the south west. He said it was a terrible decision. It is nothing like 6 000 jobs affected, member. That figure of 6 000 jobs comes from a report by the Forest Industries Federation (WA) Inc, the employer association, when it assessed jobs in the whole forestry industry—that is, native forestry, plantations and sandalwood. The same report identifies that native forestry is less than 10 per cent of the industry. We estimate the number of jobs directly impacted by the decision to end native logging is about 500 or 600. FIFWA's own report identifies the number of jobs in native forestry.

The Leader of the Liberal Party came in here all excited and said, "What a terrible decision—6 000 jobs!" He is either deliberately misleading the house and the public because he has read and understood the report or he just does not understand it. That is completely incompetent. Whatever the answer, the member for Cottesloe should apologise to the house for making such a ridiculous assertion today. It is why he probably will not be Leader of the Liberal Party for much longer. It all depends on when the member for Vasse gets the ticker to take over. She does not want to do it now because it is a long time until the election and she will have to do some work. Ideally, she would like to somehow fall into it a bit closer to the election when things get better. What the Leader of the Liberal Party said about native forestry typifies that he just does not do the work. I asked the Leader of the Opposition whether she would reverse the decision at the next election. She said that she would make the opposition's position clear before the election. Members opposite have had a long time to think; they have been out dog whistling on this issue. I think it is time that the opposition—the National and Liberal Parties—made a clear statement. Is the opposition going to reverse the decision and restart native logging if it wins at the next election? If the opposition is not prepared to make that decision, it is trying to cause mayhem rather than doing anything serious for those industries.

The Leader of the Opposition raised a couple of other issues. With the member for Cottesloe nodding, she talked about the amount of money that is hidden away in special purpose accounts in the budget and how they are somehow a secret and hard to understand. I will give two examples. There is a special purpose account for the next desalination plant that we said we will build at Alkimos. There is \$1.4 billion in a special purpose account for the third desal plant. It is in the budget. We said that we will build it. It is not hard to read the budget. That is one special purpose account. It is not hard to find and nothing has been hidden.

The member for Cottesloe is very interested in forestry. There is \$350 million to expand the softwood plantation estate. We are doing that because the previous government never did. Under the previous government, there were years when no pines were planted—none whatsoever. The only explanation for that I have heard in this house was from the former member for North West Central. He said, "We were hoping to get some pines from New South Wales." Talk about outsourcing forestry jobs to New South Wales! It was ridiculous. We have a special purpose account of \$350 million in the budget to expand the softwood estate. It is in the budget. It is good policy. It is not difficult.

The member for Roe had a good old go at the Minister for Agriculture and Food. It was a bit of a general slap around because she does not do what he wants her to do. The member for Roe referred to the blue–green wars. When we came into government, the Department of Agriculture and Food was a shambles. The previous government had taken an enormous amount of money from the department. There was a Liberal Minister for Agriculture and Food. The coalition would not give the ag portfolio to the Nationals because not even the Libs trusted the Nationals with agriculture. Instead, there was a National Party member as Minister for Regional Development. The Nationals had the royalties for regions money. The two ministers never talked to each other and there was a parallel budget process. That is what the blue–green wars were about. Agriculture was the worst because the previous government took money out of the ag department. Brendon Grylls had a slush fund to use for royalties for regions. The ministers never talked to or trusted each other, and the outcomes for regional WA were appalling. People used to talk about the department of agriculture facing a fiscal cliff because of what the former government had done to it. The current minister fought hard to get that money back into the agriculture department. The opposition gives her no credit for that and does not recognise the shambles the portfolio was in when we came to government. Just remember that!

The member for Cottesloe said we spent too much money on infrastructure. On the one hand, we are not building enough social housing—sorry, you do not want it in your electorate. I understand that. But we should be spending more money on social housing and we should be spending more money on infrastructure.

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms R.S. Stephens):** Member for Cottesloe!

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**Mr D.J. KELLY:** The member for Cottesloe listed a number of regional hospitals that we should be spending money on and all these other things that we should be spending money on, but then he said we were spending too much money on infrastructure and competing with the private sector. At least in the one speech get your lines consistent! If you are going to argue one thing in one speech and then a week later argue something else in another speech, you might get away with it, but when you argue two diametrically opposed points in the same speech, it is blatantly obvious.

**Ms J.J. Shaw:** Donald Trump does that!

**Mr D.J. KELLY:** Yes, there is a lot of Trumpians on the other side.

Members opposite raised a lot of rambling issues. The Leader of the Opposition, in a rather fleeting way, complained about our refusal to deal with cost-of-living issues in a number of portfolios. I just want to remind the Leader of the Opposition how the former Liberal–National government dealt with household pressures when she was in government. In the water portfolio, which she should be well aware of because she was the minister for a considerable period, the Liberal–National government was cutting off the water of 2 500 families—each year—that were struggling to pay their water bills. That was 2 500 households in the last full year of the Barnett government, which was about 50 a week. Every working day, Monday to Friday, the Leader of the Opposition would get up in the morning as Minister for Water and by the time she went to bed another 10 families had had their water reduced to a trickle because they could not pay their bills. As Minister for Water, the current Leader of the Opposition put up water bills every year the Liberal–National government was in government by greater than the rate of inflation. It was not that she did not understand what that was doing to households because I used to raise it in the house. I used to sit on that side and every day I would raise it when she was sitting over here. Every day, she would get up in the morning and by the time she went to bed as Minister for Water another 10 households had had their water reduced to a trickle because they could not pay their bills.

When I became minister, one of the first things I said to the Water Corporation was that it had to deal with this issue in a different way. I told people at the Water Corporation to go out, be proactive, talk to those families who are struggling and find out what they could do. That is what they did. They interviewed people who were struggling with their bills and they found out what their issues were. They found out that people often got an unexpectedly large bill that would throw them behind and they never caught up.

The Water Corporation put in place a number of programs. One of them is Medical Assist, which I think is just brilliant. They found that people doing home dialysis, who were saving the taxpayer money because they were not doing dialysis in a hospital but were doing it at home, were getting a massive water bill. We introduced a program so that people doing home dialysis get 180 000 litres of free water. They can do their dialysis at home and save taxpayers' money by not taking up a spot in hospital, but they do not have to worry about their water bill. There are over 100 patients now doing that. We have now extended that to families who have someone in the household who is incontinent. If a family has a kid with some sort of medical issue or intellectual disability that makes them incontinent, families end up using their washing machine all day. Now, they can also qualify for Medical Assist.

We have Start Over. If someone has one unusually high bill and they have gone back to paying their regular bills but they cannot get over that one large bill, we have a scheme whereby if they pay their bills for the next two years, we will write off that debt. In the last year before COVID hit, the number of people who had their water reduced to a trickle because they could not pay their bills was fewer than 800. There were 2 500 under the former government's watch; on ours it was fewer than 800. During the COVID pandemic, we stopped all that enforcement-type behaviour, but now that COVID has passed and we have gone back to dealing with those people who have fallen behind, we have not gone back to the way it was done under the previous government's watch. In fact, we are well under those numbers, with 500 in the last full year. That is just one example. On this side, we reduced the number of people in hardship by taking a compassionate approach to people who are struggling to pay their water bills; on the other side, members opposite were harsh and punitive. No matter how many times I raised it, the then minister, the current Leader of the Opposition, did nothing about it. All it took when we came to government was to say to the Water Corporation that this is a problem and unacceptable; come up with a way to deal with it. I did not tell people at the Water Corporation how to fix it, but by talking to the customers who were in hardship, they were able to come up with some solutions.

I will just raise one more issue because some of my other colleagues want to contribute. I think the member for Swan Hills may be interested in talking to the member for Cottesloe about the energy portfolio. One of the other things that we have done is put out the message about being waterwise at home—save water, save money on your water bill. That was started by a Labor government and has gone on now for almost 20 years. One of the problems is that the government's own housing is not waterwise. New government housing gets you beautiful waterwise fixtures, but there is a whole legacy of government housing that is not waterwise, so those people living in them have high bills because of high water use. I talked to the Minister for Housing and we have worked out a program whereby the Water Corporation and the Department of Communities is in the process over the next five years of retrofitting

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10 000 legacy government housing units—the ones that have the oldest fixtures and tenants that have the highest bills. When the Leader of the Opposition and the Liberal Party were in government, they did nothing about that. They left the tenants in social housing, the people who are most disadvantaged and on the lowest incomes, with the highest water bills and the worst fixtures because they were not prepared to spend the money. I think they probably knew about the problems. The fact is that as a government, we have worked on that and the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Water got together and we now have a program over the next five years to deal with this issue.

I cannot resist raising one more issue. Members opposite talked a bit about the regions. I have not heard anyone in the last two hours talk about remote Aboriginal communities. Some of the most disadvantaged Western Australians are certainly in the regions across Western Australia. It is an inequity that in the water space, non-Aboriginal communities in regional WA almost exclusively have their water provided by the Water Corporation, so they get the same quality of water as people in metropolitan WA. People who are in a remote Aboriginal community have their water provided through the Department of Communities. I am not criticising that department's efforts, but it is not its main game. This government has made a decision that it is going to change that. In the last budget, the government committed \$350 million to regularise the supply of water and, incidentally, power and improve housing for Aboriginal Western Australians who live in those remote communities. I am really proud that we have taken that decision. I know that the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party, despite all that interest they showed in disadvantaged Western Australians in their speeches, are now too self-absorbed to listen to the response.

As I said, I am really proud that this government is taking on that difficult issue. It is complicated. There has to be a lot of consultation. COVID has made that consultation difficult. That issue has also been made difficult because the federal Liberal–National government pulled out all its funding to remote Aboriginal communities and said, “We’re out of here. We’re leaving it to the states.” After eight years of the former coalition government ignoring this issue, the federal Liberal–National government pulled out the funding. Therefore, not only did we have to make up that funding, we had to make the decision to regularise the delivery of water in those remote communities. Despite all those difficulties, we are going to do it, and I am immensely proud of that. I will leave it to my colleagues to raise some other issues.

**MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection)** [6.20 pm]: I want to make a contribution to this—I was going to say debate, but the topics that have been covered by the opposition have ranged far and wide. I will go back to the motion before the house —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government's failure to address the rising crises across multiple portfolios, including the failure to respond to the pressures impacting Western Australian households, despite sitting on a massive \$6 billion surplus.

The motion is about stress on community organisations and Western Australian families, and the cost of living. We heard input on some of those issues, but we also heard about industrial land supply, gas supplies —

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Limestone blocks.

**Ms S.F. MCGURK:** Yes, we also heard about that.

We also heard at length about agriculture from the member for Roe, about the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, and, finally, about the solar eclipse. That debate ranged far and wide. I can only imagine that is because the opposition ran out of things to say. Its criticism of this government on this issue did not have a lot of substance.

One of the reasons that members of the opposition struggle on this point is that this government's strength is underpinned by its economic performance. I am very proud of the social policies and initiatives that we have put in place since we have come to government. We have tackled some very entrenched and what have been described by others as “wicked” social problems, particularly in reforming some of the difficult social policy areas that confront vulnerable communities in not just Western Australia but also the rest of the country. We are tackling those issues, and I will speak to those in particular. We are also making sure that the economy is healthy and that people can find jobs so that we are able to provide government funding for those reforms. Underpinning that is a healthy economy. In fact, some would say that our economy is in rude health. We understand that there is another side to that coin—that at times a healthy labour market will create skill shortages, and that is causing pressure across the continuum. We are working hard to address that. Not only is this government characterised by economic management, and the results speak for themselves, but also that has given us the capacity to deal with some difficult social issues. I believe that the community sector in particular recognises that we are a competent government, and a government with heart and a commitment, and that we are providing not just a sugar hit or quick fix to complex issues but are challenging all of us—government services, the community sector and the community itself—to

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step up on some of these difficult social issues that confront any modern democratic system around not only Australia but the world.

There are many indicators of this government's economic performance. This state has had the strongest recovery in jobs of all the states, 10.5 per cent higher than pre-COVID levels. The figures from the ratings agencies speak for themselves about this government's amazing economic performance. Deloitte Access Economics said in the executive summary of its July 2022 *Comparative analysis of cost of living* report —

**As a share of median income, mortgage repayments on the median house in Perth ... and median unit ... were lower than all other capitals.**

It said also —

While Perth's cost of living is considerably lower on average, its median household weekly income ... was second only to Sydney ... but higher than Melbourne ... and Brisbane ...

It said also —

Analysis of housing costs for the four regional cities found that **Bunbury was the most affordable in terms of median prices and median rents for both houses and units.**

I could refer also to a 5 September report from Moody's Investors Service. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, which is not always keen to give bouquets to a Labor government, said in its biannual report on the Western Australian economy in September that the Western Australian economy has emerged from COVID-19 the envy of the world.

The ANZ *Stateometer* quarterly report of August 2022 states —

WA's economic performance accelerated in Q2, driven mostly by the trade component.

The S&P Global WA credit rating report in June also acknowledged the economic performance of the Western Australian Labor government. That is significant. It is also in sharp contrast with the economic performance of the former Liberal-National government. Despite a boom and significant investment, particularly in the oil and gas sector, it managed to not only blow those opportunities but also take the government, which at that stage had a budget surplus, into deficit, something the then Premier said he would never do, but of course he did, and racked up tens of millions of dollars of debt. The record of the former government's woeful economic management speaks for itself.

Underpinning our work has been our good economic management. That has meant that we have been able to deliver important inputs to the community sector. A good example is how we have been nimble in adjusting our indexation to the non-government community services sector. That can be contrasted with the Barnett government's cost-saving decision to change the indexation methodology for that sector. That decision went only one way—namely away from the community sector. In contrast, in 2019 when we were in government, we changed the indexation calculation and were able to provide an additional \$30 million for that sector. This year, the sector asked us to change the formula again, and the Treasurer agreed to an uplift in the indexation from 2.55 per cent to 3.53 per cent. That will deliver an increase of \$41.8 million over the next four years. I note that according to the Western Australia Council of Social Service, that is the impact of a lack of indexation on contracts dating back to 2014–15. Although that particular increase that I referred to is for only one year, it will stay in contracts going forward.

We have also made increases to accommodate the 2012 equal remuneration order. Those uplifts have been in the order of \$82 million over five years. That is a significant investment that we have made to the community services sector. In 2021–22, we gave an additional boost of \$14.5 million to a slice of those community organisations that were not eligible for previous uplifts under that order. We are listening to the calls for adjustments to the indexation calculation. We are delivering more money and, as I said before, we are adjusting the weighting of that indexation.

The Minister for Water, who spoke prior to me, spoke very convincingly on the attention to detail he has provided in his portfolio and the sort of work that can be done in the area of water supply. Of course, every household relies on water supply and people are conscious of the cost of water when they need to pay their bill. We are not only providing some relief in the hardship utility grant scheme by making sure it has been reinstated, which we have done as a government, but also properly understanding where hardship comes from and adjusting and tweaking the policy responses as a result. We heard some very good examples of that from the Minister for Water. In 2020, one of the things we did as a government was to give a \$600 cost-of-living rebate to all households as an electricity credit. The Leader of the Opposition called that a pre-election bribe. That is just one example of opposition members not being able to help themselves. They cannot bring themselves to say, "Yes, that is a good initiative. We understand that the budget is in good health and we will acknowledge that to households." When we do it, it is called a pre-election bribe. We spent \$1.9 billion over the previous three years to keep household fees and charges low and provide relief through the pandemic. There are lots of examples of when we have done that. I talked about the

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HUGS payments but there are also the guidelines so that we can adjust the payments and make sure we are providing relief to those people who really need it.

The most telling example, which both sides of politics are aware of, was the opposition—then the Liberal–National government—cutting financial counselling. That spoke volumes to the WA community, particularly those doing it tough, on what your side thinks about making sure assistance is provided not only when people need it, but also to build their capacity to deal with hardship when it comes up again in the future. In cutting financial counselling, I remember at the time the then minister’s understanding of the work done by financial counsellors was so rudimentary as to be almost non-existent. There were howls of disbelief not only from the community sector but also the WA community. That was backtracked a little but, as a government, we were able to reinstate and now extend financial counselling services in Western Australia, so much so that I believe I have made lifelong friends in that sector! I was not able to go to their awards this year because I was down with COVID, but I know they do fantastic work and all credit to them, and strength to their arm.

We have done things like listen to people in the sector when they said they wanted longer contracts so they could provide security of employment for people working in the sector. Often people are not working in that sector because of the wages, although, of course, we do try to give them fair wages. It is a value proposition. They are committed to the work but they need security of funding and security of employment for people working in that sector. Before the 2017 election, I held round tables with the sector and asked them what they wanted. It was chief amongst what they asked for and we have now been able to deliver it. New contracts have been delivered and, where we can roll over to five-year contracts, we are doing that throughout the whole of the public sector in relation to community services. We now have a whole of public sector commissioning strategy for the community services sector. That has been really welcomed. It is a much more sophisticated strategy, not just paper or words.

The sector, the Western Australian Council of Social Service and their peak bodies that meet—I also meet with them—have acknowledged this is done jointly and they appreciate that. I look forward to working with WACOSS and the other peak bodies that represent the community sector to make sure it is implemented. We are doing the hard work across different portfolios and different agencies to implement the commissioning strategy. I know we are doing that within my portfolio, whether it is in out-of-home care commissioning or family and domestic violence prevention and we have prioritised child sexual abuse therapy contracts. I know that the Minister for Housing; Homelessness is doing it for homelessness contracts.

This is the hard work that has not been done for a long time. It was certainly never touched for eight and a half years under the previous government, looking at contracts as a whole and saying, “Are these fit for purpose in the twenty-first century?” It is not about only money. It is about understanding the contracts themselves and doing the work that they need to do with the best evidence for this challenging work. Perhaps it will be about the money attached to those contracts, but that is only part of the picture. We all have to work together as a commissioning agency or commissioning government—organisations that are commissioning that work—and the sectors themselves to look at what is best practice in any of those areas. I think we will see better services as a result. This is the sort of work we never saw in eight and a half years under the previous government; in fact, we still hear nothing of it from opposition members. They have no idea of the hard work that needs to occur. We do not have all the answers but I believe that, together with the community services sector and researchers, and drawing on evidence and good practice, we can be greater than the sum of our parts in coming together and delivering in some very challenging areas of social policy and social services. I am very conscious of that in child protection, for example. This is the sort of work we are doing to really make sure within the districts that work within the Department of Communities there are good professional frameworks, practice, supervision and support for the difficult and challenging work they do and that they do very well. We are also working very closely with our community sector organisations to make sure we are delivering on keeping children safe and supporting families of origin—biological families—if at all possible to keep children safe with those families. If the children need to be removed while the families work on the issues they have, they are removed for the shortest period and are reunited as quickly as possible. That work is done with those families.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** If children are removed for a longer period of time, we support the carers and cultural plans for those children. We also support the team who work around those children—their carers and extended family—to make sure we get the best outcomes. As a result of doing that work, we have seen significant improvements. For instance, we know that Closing the Gap—one of the new targets—is for a reduction of the number of Aboriginal children in care. We have seen a reduction of Aboriginal children in care of around 3.3 per cent and a 6.6 per cent reduction of non-Aboriginal children in care over the last 12 months. This is the second year in a row in which we have seen a reduction. What I am most proud of is the work being done in early intervention and some of the contracts we have given to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. We have seen some really fantastic results.

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When the member for North West Central talks about these difficult problems in her community, I do not believe I have ever said anything in this place or publicly that would give cause to say I am disregarding the community's concern about antisocial or criminal behaviour—in her community or any other. I understand that there are issues. I am focused on looking at practical solutions to what are difficult problems. Working with the families that are having these issues and making sure that children can be supported by these families is one of the ways that we will get real, generational results that will be good for everybody. That is what Target 120 does; it works with the family, not just with the young people, so there is a multiplier effect. I agree that in the scheme of things, the numbers are not huge, but we need to look at the evidence of what will create real results so that we can start to turn off the supply tap, if you like, to Banksia Hill Detention Centre, which I think we would all be interested in doing, while at the same time we reduce offending. We do not want to just turn the tap off of the kids going to Banksia Hill; we want to stop them offending. We want to stop the antisocial behaviour. We want them to go to school. We want to see them in safe housing. We want to reduce the underlying issues going on at home. That is the sort of early intervention work that is happening in child protection.

I do not say that we have a silver bullet or a solution for every family, but I think that some of that work is very good. We should acknowledge that the child protection workers in our state and our community partners are doing good work, and we should be encouraged by that. Is there more to do? Yes, most certainly there is, but I am encouraged by the results of some of the child protection early intervention work through Target 120. It is supporting families that need good partners to work with them so that we can reduce the rate of domestic violence, increase the attendance of children at school and make sure that young children—babies, toddlers and the like—are given all their health checks and are brought up in a happy and healthy environment and that they thrive. That is what we all want. This is the sort of work that the government is doing that I am proud of.

Domestic violence is another example of an area that is receiving reform, attention, resources and effort from our government, yet we saw nothing of this in eight and a half years. It is not as though people were not aware that domestic violence was an issue in our community at that time. In fact, in 2015, when the opposition was in government, Rosie Batty was made Australian of the Year. Big national conversations were being had, but when the opposition was in government, there was radio silence. Absolutely nothing was being done at a government or systemic level to address these issues.

A good example of where we have provided attention to detail and are doing the hard work is the announcement just this week of \$11 million for more resources for the joint response teams whereby police work with Department of Communities staff. They were called child protection staff, but those positions will now be called family safety officers. We will recruit some staff who are skilled in domestic violence issues, not that they have not been up until now, but we are looking to tweak some of the skill sets in those response teams, as well as add capacity. Once those positions are rolled out in full, there will be 34 more people across the state who will be able to triage the incident reports that come via the police, work with the community sector organisations and provide practical support for domestic violence victims. Of course, domestic violence not only is terrible for the victims, in particular women and children, and the broader family and community, but also has knock-on effects such as antisocial behaviour by kids who experience violence at home. It has child protection implications. There can be housing destabilisation and financial abuse can happen. As a government, we want to address domestic violence properly. We want to hold the perpetrators to account and address some of their behaviour, and provide some healing, understanding and support for victim survivors, and perhaps break what can often be a revolving door with either the same partner or different partners and prevent the story repeating over generations. There are many examples of how we are working to do that. In fact, with the announcement of the \$11 million in funding this week, we have brought new spending for our domestic violence effort to \$160 million. We have increased recurrent spending alone from \$49 million to \$89 million. That is a significant increase in effort to tackle domestic violence.

These are just some examples. I could talk about Home Stretch WA, which is a fantastic initiative that our government is very proud of. It is not only in dollar terms. We are proud because it is embedding a systemic change to the way we view the support for some of our most vulnerable young people—that is, those in the out-of-home care system. I am really proud that we did not just say, “We’ll implement Home Stretch and here are some dollars” and walk away. We took the time to trial a pilot and to work with young people with lived experience, Anglicare and the other community sector organisations that are involved. From talking to my counterparts in other states, I think we have one of the best systems in Australia as a result. We have a really good system that provides not only financial support to young people until they are 21 years of age in the form of foster care subsidies or home subsidies, but also mentors and Invest in Me funding.

I have talked about Target 120, but only in passing. It is another initiative that I am very proud of.

I will finish up by saying that we understand that there are people in need. We are not blind to that. We have been a good government, but we have not been that good over one and a half terms that we have dissolved all poverty



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and undone generational disadvantage. We have not been that good! We understand that there are still some very challenging problems in our community, but we are a responsible government. We are providing good economic management, which not only provides jobs for young people in Western Australia, but also gives us the means to provide immediate relief and tackle the reform of some of society's most complex problems. I believe we will be able to make some real difference for some of the most vulnerable Western Australians into the future.

**MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.47 pm]: In the short amount of time that we have left this evening, I would like to make a contribution to this debate. As has already been pointed out by both the Minister for Community Services and the Minister for Water, very few members of the opposition actually debated the motion that they put up. That is true to form. It is interesting, because yesterday when I made a speech, I opened by saying that it felt like groundhog day. When I was preparing for today's debate, it again felt like groundhog day. On 19 May this year, pretty much the same motion was brought on and pretty much the same aimless, targetless, meaningless quality of debate was offered by those opposite. Again, they did not debate the motion in front of them. Last night, I said to the Leader of the Liberal Party, "Go back into your burrow, wait your six weeks, get some new material and bring something fresh and original, and perhaps factual, relevant and of interest to the people of Western Australia, back into the chamber." When I saw the motion come on today, I could not believe it.

I could go over some of the points that the Leader of the Liberal Party made that again revealed a lack of understanding of how energy markets and systems work. I am getting bored with it; goodness knows how they feel about it across the other side of the chamber. What I will do is talk about the Liberal Party's record on cost of living when it was in government and then this government's record of cost of living, particularly with respect to energy. I think it is important to get some of these things on the record.

Firstly, under the Liberal–National government, electricity prices rose by 90 per cent. They rose by 8.4 per cent every year. Water prices went up by 66 per cent when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Water. The forward estimates that the Liberals had provided accounted for seven per cent year-on-year increases in power, six per cent increases in water, and net debt was on the way to \$44 billion. What a record—they should be so proud of that!

When we came into government, and particularly very recently, we have provided an inordinate amount of support for the cost of living. We truly understand that there are cost-of-living pressures out there and we have done our level best to address those. We froze fees and charges in 2020–21 and we capped public transport fares at two zones. In parts of the world like mine in Ellenbrook, that really does move the dial. We capped airfares for regional communities, we provided free rapid antigen tests during the COVID-19 pandemic and, in the 2022–23 budget, we kept fees and charges below the rate of inflation. The government approved increases to residential and small business electricity tariffs below the forecast consumer price index in 2022–23 as a measure to help customers manage those cost-of-living pressures.

We need to contrast that with what is going on on the east coast. In 2022–23, electricity prices for households in Brisbane will go up by 11.3 per cent; in Sydney, by 8.5 per cent; in Adelaide, by 7.2 per cent; but in Perth, as I say, they will go up by only 2.5 per cent. In fact, in October 2022, the commonwealth budget forecast that retail electricity prices will increase by an average of 20 per cent nationally in late 2022 and a further 30 per cent in 2023–24, with a total of 56 per cent over the period. The forecast is that retail gas prices are also set to increase by 20 per cent on the east coast, with a 44 per cent increase over the next 18 months. We are not impacted by these significant increases. As I say, we have capped electricity tariff increases to CPI. We are not part of the national electricity market—thank goodness we are not. We develop an electricity pricing outlook, we set electricity tariffs, and we have made policy decisions that are specifically designed to address these cost-of-living pressures. Our government's uniform tariff policy ensures that households and small businesses pay the same amount no matter where they are in the state, and we will always have a mind to cost-of-living pressures when we set our policies on electricity tariffs.

The Ministers for Community Services and Water both discussed the household electricity credit rebates, with rebates of \$600 in 2020 and \$400 in 2022. Again, those were specifically designed to address cost-of-living pressures. There was also the WA small business and charity electricity tariff offset—a one-off offset of \$2 500 provided for groups that are on community service and charitable accommodation electricity tariffs. That was another means by which we assisted many of the community services operators that the Minister for Community Services talked about.

I think it is important to talk about the hardship utility grant scheme, because that is a very direct way that we can assist people who are encountering cost-of-living pressures. We have both increased the funding and extended the reduction in eligibility for the HUG scheme to 1 February 2023. People can now apply for the grant at 90 days rather than the previous 180 days. That extension gives more time for families doing it hard to access support and ensure that HUGS assistance is made available and targeted to those most in need.

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We also developed a case management process in Synergy, so we are walking alongside those experiencing hardship instead of just disconnecting people. I thought that the Minister for Community Services' point about the withdrawal of financial advice and supports was very well made. As she said, it is so important to not just provide relief, but also build capability so that people are more resilient and more capable of weathering difficult economic storms.

The Synergy case management process was so successful that it is now business as usual for Synergy and has scaled up. Since the pilot was launched in July 2020, hundreds of customers have graduated, clearing millions of dollars of debt. They are now in a better position to manage their energy bills going forward. In the unfortunate circumstance in which HUGS is not able to operate and people do end up being disconnected, it is important to appreciate that under the previous government, between the financial years 2011–12 and 2016–17, the number of Synergy residential customers who had their power disconnected increased by 82 per cent. It is rank hypocrisy for members opposite to come into this place and say that they care about cost-of-living pressures when they thought nothing of restricting people's access to water, as the Minister for Water pointed out, and when they so readily disconnected thousands of people. In their last months in government, 5 235 disconnections occurred, 7 032 people were referred to debt collectors and 83 839 customers requested an extended time to pay. This was all going on at a time when the Liberal–National government cut funding to financial counsellors, slashed the funding to HUGS, increased power bills by 90 per cent and increased household bills by \$2 100. I say shame on the former Liberal–National government.

Under this government, disconnections have dropped from 5 235 to 726, debt collection references have dropped from 5 858 to 3 417, and requests for an extension of time to pay have dropped from 88 577 to 66 495. That is a remarkable achievement. It just goes to show what happens when we have a government that actually cares for people, acknowledges that there are people in need who deserve access to essential services and will act through the various levers that we have—be it through water or electricity tariffs—to meaningfully address cost-of-living pressures.

I thought it was great to listen to the Minister for Water speak about the various initiatives around social housing. There are some really interesting things going on in the energy portfolio that are also specifically engaging with social housing. In fact, when we did the Economics and Industry Standing Committee report, we dedicated a whole chapter to energy poverty. We specifically said that without even touching welfare payments, we can have a marked impact on people's quality of living purely by reducing their costs associated with basic utilities. This government has committed to install \$6 million worth of solar panels at 500 social housing properties as part of the WA recovery plan's \$66.3 million renewable energy technologies package. That is really going to move the dial for people living in social housing. The first 10 properties in Clarkson, Gosnells, Balga, Ellenbrook—close to my heart—Rockingham and Girrawheen that had rooftop solar systems installed in December 2020 reported savings in the first six months of up to \$200. That really moves the dial for vulnerable households. Synergy now continues to roll out these systems across the south west interconnected system.

I refer to the household energy efficiency scheme. By the way, that was again cancelled under the Liberal–National government. That was yet another way that members opposite could have helped people, but they just ripped the rug out from under them. We have announced a \$13 million program to improve energy efficiency for households facing hardship. They will get an energy efficiency assessment and tailored education to improve their consumption behaviours, and select households may even receive appliance upgrades. That is a significant way of helping people to address cost-of-living pressures. It is disgraceful that the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA withdrew that program. I think it needs to be put on the record that that is the way they tend to deal with cost-of-living pressures. They make it even harder. I cannot understand why.

Some other really interesting things are being done to lower costs. I think the community battery trial is quite interesting. It allows households when they are not at home to inject electricity into a community battery and withdraw it, thereby offsetting some of their electricity consumption from the grid. The trials associated with that—again, one was done in Ellenbrook—have shown that households have been able to reduce their electricity costs. More broadly, there are system-wide benefits. Energy efficiency programs lower the costs of energy for everyone. That is very important. Consumers' voices are now being heard. We have a consumer advocacy process—a resource that is situated within the policy arm of the state government that looks at consumer issues. That, again, was completely overlooked by the Liberal–National government.

As I say, when members opposite were in government, electricity prices rose by 90 per cent and water prices went up by 66 per cent. The Liberal–National government's forward estimates showed even more price increases. Why did the former Liberal–National government want to increase power prices? It wanted to increase prices because it wanted to privatise Western Power; we all know that.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.