

PETROL PRICES, GOVERNMENT PROMISE

834. Mr SWEETMAN to the Premier:

Prior to the last election, the Australian Labor Party distributed in my electorate and many other country electorates copies of a leaflet containing propaganda on fuel prices. They read -

Geoff Gallop . . . will bring back petrol price control for country WA.

On the reverse side of the leaflet were the words "To KILL the GAP vote LABOR".

- (1) Is the Premier aware that unleaded petrol is available in the Perth metropolitan area today for 85c a litre and that unleaded petrol in my electorate is up to \$1.18 a litre, a price difference of 32c a litre, which is rising?
- (2) Fuel prices in country areas will increase for the same reasons that they have increased in Perth. Given that the Government has not made a difference to fuel prices in nearly 14 months, will the Premier now admit that he misled the people of Ningaloo and country people at the last state election?
- (3) Premier, is this an unachievable promise, a deferred promise or a broken promise to country WA?

Dr GALLOP replied:

- (1)-(3) I always find it amusing when the Liberal and National Parties raise the issue of petrol prices. Some members have long memories that go back to 1993. Does the member for Ningaloo know what the first decision of the Court Government was? It was to abolish the regulations that established a system of retail price capping in major regional centres in Western Australia. The Court Government could not get into power quickly enough to remove that regime that had been established by the previous Labor Government. The reality of the situation is that the Labor Government has acted on its commitment in this area. We passed in Parliament the 50-50 legislation, which the previous coalition Government was requested to do and refused. Secondly, and very importantly to this argument, we established a process to get a maximum wholesale fuel price for Western Australia; that was not easy. We are prosecuting one of the major oil companies in Western Australia for breaching the regulations associated with that decision.

Mr Barnett: Why has the gap gone up 50 per cent from 23 cents to 32 cents since you have been Premier? You have been in government for one year.

Dr GALLOP: I know why the Leader of the Opposition is touchy today. Perhaps we should talk about the Swan division of the Liberal Party. It is going really well at the moment. Its former president is in prison and its treasurer has just been found to be a fraudulent lawyer. It is no wonder that the Leader of the Opposition is a bit touchy.

I will refer to the issue of retail capping.

Mr Trenorden interjected.

Dr GALLOP: Does the Leader of the National Party want to hear the answer?

Mr Trenorden: You have nothing to do.

Dr GALLOP: He does not want to hear the answer. The Government will issue a paper soon and, indeed, it has been sent off -

Mr Trenorden interjected.

The SPEAKER: There is a limit to the tolerance allowed to the Leader of the National Party. In this question my patience has finished.

Mr Masters interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, the member for Vasse!

Dr GALLOP: Every member of this Parliament should acknowledge the complexities of establishing a retail-capping regime. It is clear that this side of the House has the will to do it; the other side of the House does not. This side of the House has the capacity and the desire to do it well. We will consult with retailers in regional Western Australia to make sure that the regime will work properly.

I will go back again over the regime. We are delivering what we promised we would deliver in a very difficult area. We will establish retail capping for major regional centres in Western Australia but we will do it after proper consultation with all the people who will be affected so that we can devise a proper regime. This side of the House has the will and the capacity to do it well. The other side of the House has never had the will to tackle the major oil companies. It lacks the capacity to know how to do anything like this well.