

COST OF LIVING — FEES AND CHARGES

599. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

I refer to comments made by Ms Louise Giolitto, CEO of the Western Australian Council of Social Service, on 29 September, when she said —

“At a time when the cost of non-discretionary items like food, transport and housing are rising at an alarming rate, the state government should be using any surplus money to ease the pain for struggling households,” ...

With a \$6 billion surplus, why does the Premier continue to refuse to consider freezing government fees and charges to provide much needed and urgent relief for these households?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

That is the same question as the one that was asked yesterday. Firstly, I am sorry that I missed the start of question time—I could not hear the bells—but I will answer the member’s question on these matters. The reality is that in the state budget, we put down fees and charges. We put them down. We gave everyone a \$400 credit on their electricity bill. Across the board there was, from memory, a 3.8 per cent reduction in fees and charges. We are the only government in Australia that has done that. No other government has put them down. We are the only one that has done that. As I said to the member yesterday, we have also provided everyone with free rapid antigen tests. No other government in Australia did that. We have also provided the two-zone transport fare that people who use public transport can access. Public transport in the eastern states is markedly more expensive than it is here. We have also provided support for people in the regions who want to fly to Perth by capping airfares. That kicked in on 1 July. These are all cost-of-living measures that benefit people. In addition to the \$400 payment, we have provided an energy assistance payment of \$318 to pensioners and eligible households—300 000 households across the state are eligible for that payment.

In the wages policy that we have just launched, the biggest benefit will go to the lowest paid workers. People who go out there and work for 38 or 40 hours a week and receive the least amount of pay will get the biggest benefit out of the wages policy. Some people complain about that. They say that is not fair; the most highly paid should get the most. I do not agree. I support the lower paid workers.

We have put all those things in place. If the Liberals and Nationals had their way, we would be in deficit. That is their *modus operandi*. Every time over the last five and a half years that we have got the state’s finances back on track, they have attacked it—every single time. If they had their way and we went through every commitment that they have made, everything that they have criticised, and everything that they say should have been funded, we would be significantly in deficit. What would that mean? That would mean that our debt would climb, and our interest payments would climb, at a time when interest rates are going up. As I said yesterday, and I am going to keep saying this, every indicator says that next year, there will be a worldwide recession. That is what they are saying. That is what the economists around the world are saying. A whole confluence of events is pointing in that direction. Hopefully, that will not occur, but I suspect it will. What is the best position for Western Australia to be in if that happens—deficits and debt, as opposition members are advocating for, or surpluses, with debt going down, so that we can afford to respond and can manage a decline in revenues that might occur? Would opposition members rather be in the position of New South Wales and Victoria, with \$150 billion or so worth of debt each, and with deficits in the vicinity of \$20 billion a year? Would they rather that? No. I would not, but clearly they would.

When opposition members were in office, true, they delivered deficits, and debt climbed to \$44 billion. We have now got it down to \$29 billion. Their model was to sell off Western Power. Victoria and New South Wales sold off their electricity entities, and where are they now? That one-off sugar hit has gone. We now also have the energy crisis, for which privatised entities are partly responsible.

Your model is catastrophic. You were catastrophic in government, you are catastrophic in opposition and you would be catastrophic if you were ever re-elected.