

COST OF LIVING — FEES AND CHARGES

**577. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. Why is the Premier refusing to act when the rising cost of living was the lead cause of food insecurity for the first time since the report began, and the government could provide relief to those households by freezing fees and charges immediately?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

I welcome the new member for North West Central. I think this is perhaps a lesson for that member: members opposite need to listen to the answer before they ask a supplementary. As I explained to the Leader of the Opposition before, in the budget we put down fees and charges, and we are the only government in Australia to have done so. We looked at all the fees and charges in the basket of goods and services and then the Western Australian government gave every household a \$400 credit. Inflation is running at what? It is five or six per cent. The actual increase in fees and charges in the budget was 2.5 per cent, so naturally it was significantly less than the inflation rate, and then, on top of that, we gave people a \$400 credit. As I just outlined, we also provided significant additional support to charities around the state that provide food assistance and so forth to people. I am aware of the organisations that provide that support to people; I have visited them many times in my own electorate. The government significantly boosted that funding.

As the Minister for Transport just pointed out to me, we put in place the two-zone fare cap—nowhere else in Australia has done that. To go to the airport on the recently opened Forrestfield line is a \$5 rail charge; to catch a train to the airport in Sydney is \$20. We put in place capped airfares to regional communities around Western Australia for regional people who fly to the city—no other state in Australia has done that. Although how expensive rapid antigen tests were across Australia was a subject of some moment six or eight months ago, this government provided them free to everyone. That did not happen in any other state in Australia. That is another thing that we provided because we manage the finances well and we make sure needs are targeted.

I might also add—I think this is often lost—that the energy assistance payment is on top of the \$400 credit. If a person is on a commonwealth Health Care Card—I think 300 000 or so families around the state are beneficiaries of that—they get another \$318 on top of the \$400. These initiatives are in place all over Western Australia. When we came to office, the Nationals WA members argued that we were going to abolish the Country Age Pension and Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Cards. They were wrong again; we did not. That assistance is out there as well for pensioners around Western Australia and volunteer organisations.

All those things are out there. We are providing more support to families across the state than any other state in Australia. I might add one last thing: our wages policy supports public sector workers who earn the least. The pay increases under our wages policy for people at the bottom is, I think, the strongest anyone has seen. We are making sure those people who are suffering the most get the biggest pay increases.