

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

IRON ORE ROYALTIES — COMMUNITY DIVIDEND

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [4.02 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government for failing to deliver a community dividend from record iron ore royalties collected on behalf of the people of Western Australia leading to failures in health, child care, mental health, child protection, disability services and housing, and an increase in household fees and charges.

Before I go to the substantive part of my contribution, I want to recap some of the answers we got in question time today, because a number of questions were asked on very serious matters of the Premier, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Water and the Minister for Child Protection. There are 1 000 children unallocated in the child protection system to workers—vulnerable children in our systems.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Excuse me, members.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Quiet—a dull roar, maybe!

In answer to a question around record ramping and mental health presentations, the Minister for Health spoke about spending record amounts. Once again, we see elective surgery pushed out. Really, the Premier and the minister were trying to outline that they were taking a sensible and pragmatic approach to the situation. However, they have been forced to cancel those elective surgeries because of their own mismanagement. That translates into people living in discomfort and in pain, unable to take care of their families or participate in work. In many cases, they now have to live with that for months, maybe another year, until the system is back to capacity and we can see it return to a degree of normality.

As he always does, the Minister for Water chose to reflect on the previous government and its record rather than providing advice on why he was not looking at trying to reduce the significant dividend paid by the Water Corporation to prop up the government's bottom line—not that it needs it at the moment; it has a significant amount sitting in the kitty—and relieve some of the pressures on household fees and charges. Very arrogantly, I thought, he outlined a response that actually did not pay attention to the question, which was: what is the government doing to address the structural issues in that government trading enterprise to allow us to say that we should be rethinking how that dividend is paid? If it is a cash cow for government, it does not matter whether it is this side or the other side; everyone is addicted to it. In times like this when families are under pressure, we should be looking at ways to reduce that dividend take to improve the accessibility and affordability of those basic set fees and charges.

I found the Premier's response to me about the housing issues quite distressing. I referred to people and organisations of eminence in our community who deal with some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I asked about the fact that 10 of them had written to the Premier as part of the Housing Emergency Response Group seeking his support for a number of areas that they feel would make a real difference in reducing homelessness and the pressures on our housing and homelessness issues that we are dealing with across the community. They are Mark Glasson of Anglicare WA; the director of Centrecare; the chief executive officer of Circle Green Community Legal; the executive officer of the Financial Counsellors' Association; the chief executive officer of Foundation Housing; the chief executive officer of the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia; the chief executive officer of Shelter WA; the CEO of the Western Australian Association for Mental Health; and the CEO of the Western Australian Council of Social Service. All of them together in one letter to the Premier on 6 May were asking for a response from this government—a joined-up response across government—to respond to the challenges they see.

But the Premier did not provide a response about whether he would go back to that group, given it has raised with him these most important matters. He just pointed to the fact that the strong financial management of this state government had placed it in a good position to be able to respond to some of those challenges. This is a crisis that needs urgent action. These bushfires are emerging in all portfolios.

On the other side of the ledger, this state government has access to a growing pile of dollars that have been gifted to it by the iron ore sector and as a result of the GST deal struck by the federal Liberal–National government to ensure that our state gets its fair share and to ensure that we can look after the exact issues I have just raised. Having gone through those questions during question time, which are not insignificant, we can only conclude that this is a government that has its head in the sand when it comes to some of these challenges.

The Premier came into this house yesterday and gave himself a pat on the back, as the new Treasurer, for this government's management and made a very bold claim that he was leading one of the best performing subnational governments in the world. That is a lofty title to add to his list of achievements. He does this while sitting on an enormous pile of dollars gifted to the government by record iron ore royalties collected and the GST returns that are flowing into this state, while bushfires burn in nearly every portfolio across the cabinet. It is great to play up to the backbenchers during question time and answer a Dorothy Dix question. But I warn members in this place

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

that it is folly to believe our own spin. It is nice to play it up in here, but when those comments translate back to the groups raising these concerns, and back to the people impacted because they cannot put a roof over their head or pay their bills, that kind of arrogance does not play that well in the community.

Members in this chamber expect a degree of theatre to play out. The Premier stands and gives himself a pat on the back about financial management, for the surplus and for the state of Western Australia's books, but while this enormous operating surplus is sitting with Treasury, the government is missing the chance to pay a community dividend. Our community cannot miss the opportunity to benefit from, I would think, a once-in-a-lifetime mining boom. This boom is very different from the one that we went through in 2006 to 2007–08; that was a construction boom. It was a boom driven by a significant number of people moving to Western Australia as there were major projects underway. Our government, the Liberal–National government at the time, had to manage that population increase without the benefit of the GST deal and with very low iron ore prices. The Premier can crow all he likes about the surplus and suggest that it is a result of good management, but let us be clear: this government has benefited enormously from the gift that has been provided by record iron ore prices, a strong GST deal that was secured from the Liberal–National coalition federally, and billions of dollars of funding from the commonwealth that has flowed through for road projects across our state. That is cold comfort for those who have to foot a \$99 increase in household fees and charges; they will need to find that additional \$99 in their household budget. As evidenced by the letter from Shelter WA and those 10 organisations, many people simply do not have even a dollar to keep a roof over their heads. They are not going to be able to give the Premier the accolades that he came into this house looking for when he said that the government has managed to keep increases at an all-time low, because \$99 for someone who does not have a home and cannot afford to pay their bills is simply beyond their reach—and the Premier is sitting on top of a pile of cash!

We are living in extraordinary times. I touched earlier on the boom we had at the beginning of the term of the previous Liberal–National government; it was a boom of a different sort. Construction was driving an enormous number of people to Western Australia; the number we were talking about at the time was equivalent to the entire population of Tasmania moving to Western Australia in one go! The flowthrough of that to government was that it had been able to house people and provide water and power, which required investment in significant essential services. We did all of that. We had to ensure we were paying teachers, nurses, child protection officers and other public servants who were being drawn out of the public service to high-paying jobs in the mining sector. We were under pressure to do that so we could have teachers in front of classrooms. We were very successful at that, but it put enormous pressure on our state budget, because we did not have the GST flowing back into Western Australia at that time, and we certainly did not have the royalty flow that this government is enjoying. In the context of financial management, when we reflect on what the eight years of the Liberal–National government actually delivered, that part of the equation regularly gets left out. We were supporting rapid population growth, with people coming from all over Australia to cash in on what was a remarkable opportunity for many people and, at the same time, we were investing in our state. We built Fiona Stanley Hospital and Perth Children's Hospital. We made the biggest investment in regional health in history. That comes directly from those involved in delivering that program. There were investments in hospitals and nursing posts, and upgrades to telehealth and aged-care facilities. A raft of that was going on at the same time that we were building facilities at major tertiary hospitals in the Perth metropolitan area.

We were also transforming communities all over the state. That transformation was not limited to what we heard the Minister for Transport talking about today or the program we talked about yesterday, which was the Perth City Deal. Again, that was quoted out of context, because that is what people do in this place when they want to put their side of the story, but let me provide members with the other side of the story. We have never been opposed to investment in Perth city nor of bringing dollars in from the commonwealth to support the growth of universities, public transport and things that can make our community a better place to live, work and invest. What we have always been opposed to is not seeing a commensurate spend in regional Western Australia from this government. When we saw that sign-up to the Perth City Deal we quite rightly said, "All right, if you make that investment in Perth with universities, public transport, new museums and a raft of other things, we are very supportive of that, but what about investing in our universities and tertiary education in, and having a plan for, our regional cities so they can continue to grow? How do we take some pressure off population growth and on our public transport system in the Perth metropolitan area so that we can spread that growth and opportunity around our state?" We do not see that. We have never been critical of the Perth City Deal in the sense that we do not support it; we are critical of the fact that there does not seem to be the same effort on a statewide program to grow our entire state.

It is really important to note that when we were in government, we dealt with massive population growth, we invested in regional Western Australia and we invested in tertiary hospitals and regional health. We built the Perth Stadium, which is now a piece of infrastructure that we rely on as a showcase for sport.

Mr V.A. Catania: And Perth Arena.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, the Perth Arena; the member is correct. Perth Stadium this weekend will play host to the Dreamtime round, which is typically held in Melbourne. Our hearts go out to those in lockdown in Victoria, but

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

their loss is our gain. We will play host to Michael Long and the Long Walk in advance of that. We will go to Perth Stadium, and it will be an amazing event.

Mr V.A. Catania: Back then the Labor opposition criticised the stadium.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am very aware of that, member, because I sat on the government frontbench and took the questions from the then shadow sports minister and transport minister every day.

Mr V.A. Catania: The Premier couldn't wait to open it!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Correct, yes. That has been an amazing legacy over a significant period of time, and has generated wealth for our state. They are lasting legacies for our state and will continue to be.

When we reflect on that time, we did all of that without the GST deal and without the record royalty rates that we see today. There is a legacy in this state as a result of that last boom, albeit a construction boom. Let there be no doubt that it created some challenges, and we would never walk away from that. But we made these investments. There was also the expansion of the Ord irrigation district. We made a major investment push to try to expand irrigated agriculture across the state to create new jobs and diversify our state's economy. We looked at undergrounding power and services to cyclone-proof some of the areas of the state that were under continued pressure. We provided a significant amount of funding for public housing. We refurbished a raft of Government Regional Officers' Housing, which gets raised with us again and again. They have had no love since that first flush of funding that we put through in the early days of the previous Liberal–National alliance government. These are the things that allowed us to attract and retain public servants at a time when it was very difficult to do that. We were also able to say to the private sector that we were investing, so please come forth and invest your own dollars. That was the plan from a whole-of-state perspective.

We raise this in the house today because again and again we see missed opportunities. This government is sitting on a significant operating surplus. It can still make the right decision—it is not too late. However, the first test of the Premier as Treasurer has been the announcement of an increase in fees and charges, and I think the public quite rightly would be angry to see that increase of \$99 a year. The government has another chance to get it right ahead of the state budget and to make sure it is investing in the state and leaving a dividend as a result of this unique period in time. That is what the opposition and I are urging this government to consider. The reason we are asking for this is that we see bushfires in every portfolio, but we also see opportunities to create jobs and to set up legacies for the future. That is what members are driven by when they come to this place: to leave the state in a better place than when we arrived in this house. We all work together and have that common purpose as members of Parliament.

The revenue flow to this government in the nine months to 31 March is up by \$3.678 billion compared with the same period last year. Propped up by a \$2.1 billion increase in royalties income, the operating surplus is still projected to sit at around \$3.1 billion. There has been an increase in transfer duty income. It is up by about \$376 million. An extra \$145 million in landholder duty has been collected. There is \$85 million extra in their kitty due to an increase in transactions on new and used vehicles. There is so much demand for cars that anyone looking for a Prado at the moment could probably sell their second-hand one for more than they bought it new. Of course, the government gets a benefit from those transactions. The government is awash with funds, Madam Acting Speaker, yet there is a rise in household fees and charges of \$99 for the average household, with a 1.6 per cent increase in electricity, water and vehicle charges. We hear again and again of the challenges faced by so many in our communities. The services that support our most vulnerable communities are at capacity and stretched to breaking point. Where is that social dividend? Where is the dividend for our community in Western Australia? I struggle to understand how this is not a priority for the government, and why when we ask questions in the house about this, they are pushed aside.

It is hard to stomach that massive budget surplus when we have a hospital system in crisis. I know that the shadow Minister for Health will attend to that. There seems to be a continued focus, particularly from the Minister for Transport, on hard infrastructure spend. Governments of both persuasions are to some degree guilty of that. There really needs to be a concerted effort to invest in soft infrastructure—the care economy that can provide jobs for so many people. This government will be judged if it fails to support our nurses, clinical staff, child protection workers and the most vulnerable in our system, whether that is people in aged care, disability services or child care. There is opportunity in all parts of the state to make sure that we are using part of this boom to set ourselves up better for the future. The government can still make these decisions; the budget is still being framed for September.

The government cannot come into this house and crow about the state's financial position. One of the best performing subnational governments in the world is sitting on a pile of money gifted to it by the iron ore sector and GST returns while there are bushfires in every portfolio. Challenges are being raised by not only the opposition, but also people working in these sectors and in the private sector. People are pointing out that they face significant challenges. I will let the shadow health minister canvass the health crisis. Today I asked the Premier about the housing crisis. I want to put on the record, to make sure that people understand it, a very thoughtful letter from Shelter WA and 10 different organisations. The letter reads —

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

We write to you as CEOs from the Housing Emergency Response Group, to convey our acute concern with the housing crisis, which has been made more pronounced as a result of the ending of the moratorium on evictions and rent increases ...

The housing system has been in crisis for some time. There are now almost 16,000 households on the social housing waitlist. The availability and affordability of private rentals is at a historic low. The recent Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot showed that there was just one property available for rent for a low-income family in the whole of WA.

...

The Housing Emergency Response Group wish to convey, in the strongest of terms, that

- 1. The emerging housing crisis demands a whole of government response.**
- 2. The immediate priority must be:**
 - a. Supporting people (financially) to remain in their rental homes; and**
 - b. Ensuring people who have had to leave their rental home are not exiting into homelessness.**

In a question I asked the Premier I mentioned that we had a record number of people potentially facing eviction in front of the Magistrates Court today. That information comes directly from organisations that provide advocacy for the people impacted. I think it was around 147 people on one day. That is just appalling in a state that is awash with cash. The letter goes on to say —

- 3. Services are seeing increasing levels of requests from people who cannot pay their rent and/or are being evicted and cannot find an affordable home.**
- 4. There is acute concern for the welfare of children and women living in a family and domestic violence situation which they cannot escape.**
- 5. The current situation is placing an increasing number of renters and renter households, including children, at greater risk of mental ill health effects.**
- 6. Services have significant concern about the ongoing mental health impact on staff responding to an overwhelming increase in demand and who are unable to provide housing options for people who are presenting with acute levels of stress, and a sense of hopelessness; and**
- 7. An urgent government response is needed to prevent a new wave of homelessness, housing insecurity, and increased mental health issues, due to the stress placed on individuals and families not being able to find a place to live.**

The letter then outlines four priority areas that they are calling on the government to focus on. They wrote to the Premier on 6 May and asked for his urgent response, but they have not received a response yet. I understand that the Premier is a busy man, but there is a Minister for Housing and I am sure that cabinet meets on a regular basis. This is not an insignificant group of organisations that have written to the Premier seeking attention and I think they deserve a response sooner rather than later. Given that we have raised this issue in this house, we would very much like to know how the government plans to respond so we can have confidence that some of the boom-time dollars will be spent to give relief to the many people who are under pressure.

The second issue I want to talk about again goes to homelessness—that is, the supporting housing models that are regularly talked about. I note that the Premier pointed out a number of facilities that have been developed in the Perth metropolitan area. During the election campaign, the Nationals WA put forward a proposal that we need an expansion in the amount of housing for homeless youth in Albany in particular. I think we could go into every community and make a case for that. Certainly, from my perspective, we focused on two things in Albany. One was a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility in Albany. The great southern is the only region in Australia without a residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. I would think that, given we are seeing increasing pressure in our emergency departments in the health sector, we would be making sure that we are investing at the community end by supporting people to overcome addiction and the challenges they face. Equally, when we talk about addressing mental health issues, if we invest more at the community end to support people to remain in their homes, then pressure is relieved at the other end, when people end up in the emergency department, which is the most expensive part of our health system. That is one of the calls that we made. The government could easily respond to that and ensure that the people of Albany and the great southern are able to access a long-called-for and much-needed facility. It would be widely supported.

Mr R.S. Love: I bet the member for Albany would support it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am sure she would.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

We have not been able to see any money in the state budget as yet and no planning is underway by government, despite a business case being put forward. Whether that business case or another is pursued, work has certainly been done at a community level to pursue that facility. Again, this is a real challenge. We are talking about pressures in the hospital system, but if the government invests at the other end, at the community level, it will prevent people ending up at the acute end of the health system. We ask that some of the big pile of dollars sitting in the Premier's back pocket as a result of iron ore royalties is allocated towards providing support for very worthy projects like that facility and others that were not made a priority at the last election. Norman House is another facility in Albany. I want to talk about that place a bit. I visited Norman House a number of times during the election campaign. I think the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the member for Roe accompanied me on occasion. The facility could add to the number of beds available. It was quite distressing to listen to the workers and the board members. The Albany Youth Support Association and the owner of Norman House worked with Advance Housing to provide housing for youth at risk of becoming homeless. We are dealing with complex individuals. Prior to the election, we were told that the current facility, Young House, is constantly at capacity and there is a waitlist of up to 10 people wanting a roof over their heads. This is just in Albany. Demand spiked by almost 140 per cent in 2020, obviously as a result of the COVID pandemic, employment challenges and the rest. As recently as 2020, youth seeking crisis accommodation had to sleep at the Young Street lodge in their swags, given the shortage of available beds. We need to do better. These are young people in our communities who deserve to be given a chance. They cannot get themselves back on their feet if they do not have housing or a roof over their heads. Supported housing for these youths is incredibly important. I have experience of this in my own electorate, and I will come to it at the end of my speech if I have time. That youth accommodation, that transitional housing, allows young people the space to have a stable life, which means they can seek employment, get themselves back on their feet and become productive members of the community. Without that support mechanism, they absolutely cannot. We have seen a serious increase in the number of street-present people in regional centres, much like we have seen in the Perth metropolitan area, and I think that is an amazing tragedy. We should be doing more. That would be a great dividend as a result of this boom—a great investment. I would say that every member in every electorate will have seen an increase in street-present people and homelessness in their communities. I certainly have. It is something that the government, with the significant amount of funds at its fingertips, needs to turn its mind to.

Another thing I was proud of going into the election was that in our travels across Western Australia we met with a number of women's centres. They all had challenges in dealing with the resourcing available to them. Some members' electorates already have these women's facilities in their communities. I know there is one in Port Hedland. The member for Kalgoorlie would be very familiar with the one in Kalgoorlie. They are facilities where people can walk in. They deal with women's health, women's wellbeing, family and childcare services, and domestic violence outreach. They are like a signpost to a safe place to provide access to additional services. At some facilities in our communities there was not even the ability to roster on a doctor. There was no opportunity to put people in front of medical services. From our perspective, we saw this as a priority area that this government could attend to in the formation of its budget. Our consultations with the sector revealed that there was an acute funding shortage across five existing community-based women's centres. They are currently located in Tom Price, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, South Hedland and Bunbury. Many services have high waitlists, and there continues to be higher unmet demand across WA. These facilities essentially provide all services under one roof—GPs, social workers, cancer care workers, lactation consultants, health professionals, domestic violence outreach and psychology. They are absolutely strapped. They are the centres that exist. There was a strong case for the expansion of that model beyond those five centres so those services could be provided in the Peel, the Kimberley, Albany, Onslow and Newman, where there is not that footprint currently. Evidence clearly shows that women achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes where there is a strong and well-resourced women's health service. It is very challenging talking to the operators of these organisations who do everything to work on the smell of an oily rag. They said that an additional \$15 million, or even \$2.4 million over two years, just in the short term, would address some of the challenges they saw emerging as a result of the COVID pandemic. That could then go into a long-term sustainable process by which it could be expanded. It is just another suggestion. I think it would be a wonderful legacy to ensure that we are looking after women, children and families in our communities right across the state. It would be an admirable thing to add to the list of focuses as part of the dividend from this mining boom that we leave our community.

The last thing I want to touch on is child protection and an issue that is very concerning to us, and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition raised it today in a question. I refer to the 1 000 children who have currently not been allocated a care support worker. We met representatives of the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA, and this is something they raised with us. The information they provided was very concerning. Words like “chronically under-resourced” should set alarm bells ringing when referring to the organisation that supports the most vulnerable children in our state. Union information states —

As at 5 March 2021 and 3 April 2021, approximately 1000 Children or Young People across Western Australia were without a case worker and placed on the (NLO list) otherwise referred to as the Unallocated List. The

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

number has remained unacceptably high for several months. The department's own Critical Priorities Report identifies that key tasks are not being completed within its own parameters.

If that is the case, we are failing at least 1 000 children. That is 1 000 children whom we are currently not providing a caseworker to. There are key performance indicators that the department is required to meet when someone is referred to it. The case needs to be actioned within a certain number of days. The union says the department is not meeting those key performance indicators. As a direct result of the workload pressures, staff cannot be retained. There is a high level of staff turnover because there is a high level of burnout. That is completely understandable, given the issues staff deal with on a daily basis. One district has had up to 50 staff resign in 12 months and is currently 25 FTE short on funded positions. How in a state with the amount of money that we have as a result of a once-in-a-lifetime boom are we failing so badly to support the most vulnerable children and families in our communities? These are staff on the front line who need to be supported so that those children can grow up and become productive members of our community. It is an absolute tragedy.

These are the things we expect to see as part of the dividend for our community. The government is framing its budget ahead of September and we would love to see those things addressed. They can leave a lasting legacy in communities. The human capital in our state is probably our best asset. If we are failing to invest in that because we are continually focused on big infrastructure projects that the government can see, touch and point to at election time, we are failing as policymakers and people who have been charged with looking after our state and its future.

I received an email from Share and Care Community Services in my own electorate, saying that it has been hosting a suicide bereavement service out of its own funds. It has not been able to get funding from the state government. The organisation has been managing that service from its own funds for a couple of years because it understands just how important it is. I previously raised this with the Minister for Community Services and was told no funding was available to provide that support. As of today, the organisation has said it can no longer run that program itself and will need to refer all cases that come to it to existing providers, and I can tell members that those providers in our communities are at capacity already. The organisation has been trying to fund the program and match funding against state and commonwealth funds to continue to expand and address unmet need in our community, but it is unable to do that any longer. As a result, programs such as the suicide bereavement service that the organisation is trying to deliver will no longer exist and people will be referred to other agencies.

The Avon Community Services homelessness house program is another that I have raised with the Department of Communities and the Minister for Community Services on a regular basis. Again, I have heard much talk about investment in the metropolitan area to expand youth homelessness supported living. Northam has a facility that did its absolute best to bring itself back from the brink to provide supported living for the homeless in the wheatbelt. There is nowhere else for them to go. I am not talking about just Northam, but the entire wheatbelt, so right down into the member for Roe's electorate and up into the member for Moore's electorate. It has been unable to source that funding and, as a consequence, now no longer provides 24-hour coverage. That means it is unable to provide that service to the kids and young adults who have pretty complex needs and require support and stability. We are seeing kids and young adults slip through the cracks in Northam. The facility has done a remarkable job of trying to secure funding, but to no avail. Because the wheatbelt has such small population centres spread across big areas, it is often overlooked in the delivery of some of these programs. The members for Moore and Roe would probably agree that we just do not seem to get to the top of the list for programs such as that because it is challenging to deliver them across small facilities, but that does not mean that we should not try. When we have organisations that have a model with a demonstrated outcome and have made a real difference in those young people's lives as they have gone through the program and gained employment and found their own homes, I cannot understand why we are not doing more to provide that support.

The final area for me is the Northam police and community youth centre. Every member has had a PCYC in their electorate. We should give them all a significant amount more money.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I don't. My dad used to be part of it.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I have one in Northam and that is in my electorate. It is an amazing asset.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Wasn't there one in Merredin?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: That does an outreach program. It does an enormous amount with very little funding.

If we can find the ability to provide support workers, they can fill in the gaps in our communities for those kids who do not fall into the mainstream programs and who we cannot provide support to. I refer to that human capital. If we are not using some of the wealth of our state to drive change in some of those outcomes, we are failing and this government will be measured against that. I have heard many members deliver their first speech and talk about the importance of that human capital in their communities and how much we are all engaged with those non-government organisations and people on the front line. I urge everyone to make sure that we do not blow this boom. If they have influence in this space as part of the government and access to influencing the outcome of how

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

the upcoming budget is framed, there must be a community dividend. We cannot get to the end of this four years and this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, with the dollars we have sitting in the budget, and miss out on resolving some of these challenges. There will no doubt be more as the impacts of COVID-19 stretch out across the state.

Mr D.A. Templeman: What is the current situation with the Northam PCYC?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Let me tell the minister; I have a letter here somewhere.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Does it still run the boxing there?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Yes, there is some of that. This letter that was provided to me states —

Northam PCYC relies on grant funding to run all our programs. There is no spare funding to add to what we are doing at present.

As WA PCYC applies for funding at a state level, Northam and the Wheatbelt often are not considered the highest priority.

I think governments tend to provide it to the PCYC overarching body and then it is allocated. It continues —

Other regions in Western Australia are in greater need. We find the Wheatbelt is a forgotten region.

Northam PCYC (and the Wheatbelt) would benefit greatly from a Driving Program for Youth to obtain their driver's licence.

I know that issue is shared across all regional electorates. It is incredibly difficult if young people do not have the resources and support from their family to allow them to get their licence. People have to have a car when they live in regional Western Australia. It is virtually impossible to get employment otherwise.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I think we should stick to the old system when it was run out of high schools. That is still one of the best.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I am happy to look at any options to provide support to allow our young people to access their driver's licence. There is no funding for school and holiday activities. Anxiety increases for kids who do not have a stable home life when they approach school holidays and they miss out on the structure that school provides them such as food in their belly and the ability to engage with people who are interested in progressing their future. They do not have any funding to do that. As I said before, minister, the wheatbelt is often seen as a difficult area to service. It is not a new notion. As a local member, I want to keep putting on the record these issues in the context of this debate.

Mr D.A. Templeman: My old high school is doing well, isn't it?

Ms M.J. DAVIES: The minister's high school is doing very well. It had its 100th birthday the other day. The minister was there and he spoke.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is doing a wonderful job. However, I am going to sit down and let some of our other members have a go. I am happy to talk to the minister about Northam any day of the week—it is a wonderful place to live—but I will let our other members get their concerns on the record. I am happy to listen to the minister after the break.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [4.45 pm]: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker; I was caught slightly unawares. I support this motion on the iron ore royalties community dividend. I am often fascinated by answers from the other side on questions about the cost of living. We heard today from the Minister for Water. He thought he was going to be pretty smart and give a serve to this side and criticise the excellent former Minister for Water, the Leader of the Opposition, over the changes that had to be made at that time. The Minister for Water knows the truth about a range of utilities, particularly power. Decisions were made back in the Carpenter government days—it may have been a little after that—to fix power charges, for example, to just hold them. Those charges were frozen for a considerable period. When the coalition government came to office, it was faced with the prospect of a massive difference between the cost of those services and the amount being recovered, which was a major threat to the budget. I might say, at the time the Labor Party was critical of it, as it is even now. We heard the Minister for Water today criticising the former minister and this side. Did the Labor Party come in and reduce those charges? Did it take them back? It said that those charges were excessive and were too high. Did it unwind them and set them back?

Ms M.J. Davies: No.

Dr D.J. HONEY: As the Leader of the Opposition says, no, it did not; in fact, it left them right where they were. The government was happy to receive those dividends when it came to power. Of course, in the last term of this government we had progressive massive increases in government revenue, principally from two sources. The first source of revenue it gained was from the outstanding work done by our federal members of Parliament in achieving the GST fix for Western Australia. I find it disingenuous of the Premier and, as he is now, Treasurer, and the former

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

Treasurer to claim that they had any role whatsoever in the GST fix, because I know the truth of that. I spoke to Hon Mathias Cormann, a remarkable individual and now head of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development—he has done the best out of politics of anyone I know—who said it was his proudest achievement as a Western Australian to get that GST fix. That is how it was done. Senator Dean Smith ran a marvellous campaign within the coalition to get focus on this and Hon Mathias Cormann, former finance minister for the federal government, got that fix for Western Australia, which is delivering now a dividend of billions of dollars. It was a coalition government, a Liberal–National government in Canberra, that delivered that fix for Western Australia.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Acting Speaker, please. I attended the Liberal Party of Australia Federal Council last weekend. Can I tell members what a fantastic affair it was? I could repeat parts of the Prime Minister’s speech if the member wishes because it was rousing and certainly encouraging for everyone there. Our Liberal–National Party coalition colleagues were there as well and a rousing good time was had by all. I was able to put a motion to the council, which was a commitment to continue that arrangement. Despite the backgrounding that the other side likes to carry on with, there was a unanimous vote from every state for that commitment, because they know the importance of supporting Western Australia. I will be fascinated to hear the government continue its backgrounding on that particular topic.

I will get back onto the main subject, Acting Speaker, which I am sure you are keen for me to do. The other part of the fix was, as we all know, the other major source of revenue—the spectacular increase in the iron ore price. We know that in the last few years of the Barnett-led coalition government, the price of iron ore went down to around \$US40 a tonne. In fact, it got a bit lower at one stage. Members opposite should know, or probably may know, that the revenue that the state government gets from iron ore is five per cent of the set price, if you like, for iron ore. We are now looking at an iron ore price of around \$US200 a tonne, or five times more. That means that the government’s revenue from iron ore is now five times higher than it was previously. That is the source of that revenue. Given the great concern of the now Minister for Water, and I am sure the current Minister for Energy and other ministers, when the coalition was increasing charges, now is the time for government to use that windfall to wind back some of these fees and charges, and certainly not to increase them. The Minister for Water may have missed the first part, but I will repeat it for him.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister is not allowed to speak from that seat.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Acting Speaker, the Minister for Water has been in this house long enough. I know that he is quite droning when he speaks, but he is speaking from the wrong seat in the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms R.S. Stephens): Sit down. Continue.

Debate Resumed

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I have a point of order again. He should be called and thrown out of this chamber for yelling when out of his seat.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms R.S. Stephens): Thank you, minister. Member for Cottesloe.

Debate Resumed

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. I am grateful for your protection.

This is an opportunity for the Minister for Water and the Minister for Energy to reset this and to provide some dividend back to the people of Western Australia. The people of Western Australia need that dividend. Whatever we get out of Labor, it is spin. By my reckoning, Labor Party members have something like 110 journalists employed in their various offices.

Mr V.A. Catania: And as members of Parliament.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I welcome a diversity of background in members of Parliament. I think that is very important. I recognise that in this house, some ex-journalists make an excellent contribution to this Parliament and will continue to do so. But in those offices, we have something like 110 journalists, and we get the spin. Let us look at the first part of the spin. We have the press release from Hon Mark McGowan, MLA, Premier; Treasurer et cetera, with his numerous portfolios. It states that the cost to government of keeping down the cost-of-living increases

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

will be \$377 million. There we go. The government is reaching into its pocket and giving away money, but we all know that the government does not have any money. We all know that the government gets its money from taxpayers and from people who pay these exorbitant utility bills. In fact, it is not going to cost the government. The government is simply going to tax households \$377 million less than with its previous excessive cost-of-living increases.

The next bit of spin that we get out of this press release is that it states —

From July 1, 2021, the household basket of fees and charges will rise by 1.6 per cent, below the projected Consumer Price Index of 1.75 per cent in 2021–22.

This is the budgeted increase in inflation. Of course, if we look at the numbers for inflation, we see that inflation for Western Australia is projected at only 1.4 per cent for 2021–22. In fact, the 1.75 per cent figure that is being used as the estimate of the consumer price index is the figure that was included in the budget papers, which were generated over a year ago. We know that even on the government's own figures, this rise in household fees and charges will be above the rate of inflation. Looking a bit further into the Premier's press release, it is really interesting. It states —

There will be no increase in Transperth or Transwa fares ...

I do believe that there will not be any increase in those fares, but think about the equity of that decision. Members here may not be aware of the cost of public transport to the taxpayers of Western Australia. The subsidy for public transport is over \$1 billion a year. In fact, in cash terms, the average subsidy per journey is \$6. If we include the capital cost of the public transport system, the average subsidy per journey is \$14. That means that 75 per cent of the cost of public transport already is subsidised. We are told that fixing public transport fares will save a household in Dawesville up to \$3 000 a year, but that is regardless of the person's income, so that will include the local millionaire who catches the train. I can tell members that a surprising number of local millionaires catch the train. They enjoy the taxpayer subsidising their transport. They would get that subsidy. But I can tell members that the lady in East Perth whom we visited last year, who was living with her four children in a tent, would not get that, because she did not catch public transport.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Boasting about a supposed reduction in fees, when it is just a shotgun approach —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: For goodness sake!

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I have little enough time, minister.

Point of Order

Ms L. METTAM: Acting Speaker —

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: A point of order is in progress, and the minister is continuing to talk.

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

Debate Resumed

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

We have a shotgun approach in terms of that particular policy. It was just a quick thought bubble to garner some support in the election. The truth is that a millionaire will benefit from that as much as anyone who is disadvantaged.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: If there is one person who needs to focus on people who suffer, it is the Minister for Community Services. The only member of the government to suffer a vote that went backwards in this last state election was the minister. Does the minister know why? It was because her electorate was disgusted by the way the homelessness crisis was handled in Fremantle. What did we see from this government? We saw a government literally spiriting away homeless people in the middle of the night. What a disgrace!

The press release states that motor vehicle charges will rise by a total of three per cent, double the rate of inflation. What we see in this press release is a great deal of spin from the government. It goes on even further and has the Premier saying —

“Limiting increases to household fees and charges has only been possible due to my Government's strong and sensible financial management.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

Here is a measure of strong and sensible financial management in this government: remember the \$300 million that the government invested in reducing the number of public servants? This government was going to reduce the number of public servants by 3 000, spending \$300 million in redundancies and severance payments. What in fact happened? The government spent the \$300 million—\$300 million that we could desperately use in the health system now—and the number of public service jobs went up by 7 000. We have a gap of 10 000—10 000 more jobs than the government said it would have when it spent that \$300 million. As I have said before in this place, we have reliable evidence that a good number of those public servants took the statutory six-month break and came back into the same or an equivalent job. They just received a massive boost to pay off their mortgages, so it was certainly very good for those people.

Mr V.A. Catania: I remember perhaps a member of Parliament who changed one's criteria to be able to get a payout.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am not going down that path, but I thank the member for his good intention in raising that matter.

We can look at other responsible fiscal management by this government. As I had the opportunity to mention earlier today in another debate, Metronet was going to cost just shy of \$2 billion. That was the costed, budgeted estimate that had been through rigorous scrutiny by the Labor Party, because we know we can trust it on cost estimates! That project was going to cost \$2 billion. In the latest budget paper estimate, it is \$7 billion —

Mr V.A. Catania: Ten!

Dr D.J. HONEY: As the member for North West Central said—I think we need to change his name to Nostradamus!—this project will cost \$10 billion. We know that. The member knew that; he has excellent foresight. It is a \$5 billion cost blowout—imagine that. It has blown out two and a half times on a \$2 billion project. Perhaps we can see why this government needs to increase fees and charges by more than inflation; it is to make up for monumental financial blunders like this. That is the largest cost blowout in the history of this state.

I will look at what the government did for cost-of-living charges in the previous term. These numbers come straight out of the budget papers. Electricity charges increased by \$223 for the average household. That was a 14.4 per cent increase in electricity charges over that period. Water charges went up \$166 for the average household. That is an 8.6 per cent increase in charges over that period. Over that four-year period, inflation was five per cent, so the electricity charge increases were almost three times inflation and the water charge increases were almost twice inflation. That is an \$850 increase per household over that period. These are not our numbers; they come straight out of the budget papers. We can look at the other side of it and the agencies in which these charges are increasing. The government has enjoyed massive windfalls from the excellently delivered Liberal–National fix to the GST malapportionment that was occurring before the Morrison government repaired it.

Mr D.R. Michael: Do you support fixing malapportionment generally?

Dr D.J. HONEY: I certainly support us having an increased share of GST and putting in a floor of 75¢ in the dollar, member. I am a very strong supporter of that.

If we look at the actual income of government agencies, I think it might surprise members to know just how much money the government is making out of utilities.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: These are services to the community—water, electricity, sewerage and the like—that most people in this place would consider basic services that should be delivered at cost. They should not be used to tax households. We should not be taxing households with these fees and charges. The government should be delivering these services at cost. I do not think government, through these charges, should necessarily be taking money out of consolidated revenue to support them. I think it is fair that there is a reasonable user-pays system. With all these systems, we have a safety net so that those people who are in most need can get some support. That was done when we were in government, and the current government has done it as well. If we look at page 238 of the 2020–21 *Economic and fiscal outlook*, we see that over the four years of the current budget and the forward estimates, the total dividend to government from the Water Corporation will be \$5.1 billion. Metropolitan water users will be paying \$5.1 billion more than the cost of delivering that service. That will be paid by Western Australian households. We have a million households in the metropolitan area, so members can do the sums. It is a \$5 000 tax per household for the critical services of water delivery and sewerage connections to houses.

Mr V.A. Catania: It is also a tax on regional WA because regional towns pay eight times the cost paid by metropolitan households, just to give you an example.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much, member. I am grateful, as always, for your learned interjections.

I will look at the electricity corporations. It is a pea-and-thimble trick. The net dividend of electricity corporations to government over that same period will be \$1.88 billion—almost \$2 billion. In fact, if we look at all the revenue from public corporations across all the agencies over that four years, the net dividend to government will be \$10.12 billion. That is the net dividend from government agencies and that is why we on this side are so concerned about the impact of

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

the increased charges on households. It is in the context that I do not think I have ever known or ever seen more visibly the suffering of people who are struggling to make ends meet. I have never known a period in which families have been forced out of their homes by massive increases in rental costs—10 to 20 per cent increases in rental costs. House prices are going through the roof, so ordinary families cannot afford to buy a house. They have to rent and they cannot even rent. I have never known a period like this in my lifetime. Families who have gone into rental accommodation or are struggling in their houses are being hit with increases in fees for their utilities and services that are significantly above inflation. Our contention is that this is an opportunity for the government to put a stop to this. For some considerable time, no government has enjoyed a surplus anywhere near the surplus we are enjoying now. It is a time for the government to make some structural reform. When the Labor Party was last in opposition and there were very modest budget surpluses of \$100 million or \$200 million, its members were very forthright in their comments. I will quote an article from 24 May 2017 that includes comments from Hon Ben Wyatt and Hon Mark McGowan. The article reads —

“After many years of brutal price rises, more working families are struggling with the rising costs of living in Western Australia than ever before,” then Opposition leader Mark McGowan said.

“WA Labor has spoken to people who are sacrificing their heating during winter so that they can pay their utility bills, while others are going to bed once it becomes dark so they don’t have to use electricity or heating.”

The article talks at length about the hardship, but what did the Labor Party do in government? The very same Premier and very same minister, over the next four years, increased electricity prices by 14.4 per cent and water charges to the average household by 8.6 per cent. That was two to three times the inflation rate. That is the context of it. They were bleeding hearts when they were in opposition, but they are not so keen to step up to the plate now.

The Premier made things very clear and he enunciated his strategy for the campaign during his victory speech at the last election. He pointed out that he is fiscally prudent—that is his mantra—and the government is going to have a big surplus to prove how fiscally prudent it is. I have already pointed out how this government has been profligate with taxpayers’ money. If it were not for the fact that we had those windfalls, we could be in a good deal of trouble given that the government has spent \$300 million to increase the public service by 10 000 over its budget numbers. It has spent over \$5 billion above the forecast for the Metronet project. This has a real impact on the community.

An article in *The West Australian* online dated Sunday, 9 May, states —

WA housing crisis: Singles applying for tiny houses intended as short-term accommodation for homeless
It refers to tiny, little container-sized boxes. This is the position that people are in—they are having to consider tiny, little container-sized boxes for accommodation because they cannot get any other accommodation. These are the people that the government will hit with increased fees and charges.

An article on 7News.com.au on 8 April this year states —

Fears Perth in danger of becoming ‘tent city’ due to rising rents and housing shortage

The article goes on to explain the issues.

We have heard stories, and I am sure that members on the other side have heard the same stories, of people going out and buying the cheapest car that they can possibly buy and getting it registered so that they can live in it because they could not afford to rent the house that they were in. They have children and they are registering a car so they can live in the car. We know that when people are living in vehicles, they get moved on, so it has to be registered so they can move that vehicle around and not attract the eye of the local parking authorities.

Mr P. Lilburne interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: These are the people who will be hit with these increased charges, member. If I were sitting on that member’s side of the house, I would be pretty ashamed of that because those members have been in government for four years. They have had four years to deal with this, and I heard what the Premier had to say today, but the truth is that we raised this issue two years ago. Our former shadow Minister for Housing, Mr Tony Krsticevic, raised this issue constantly. The Premier had a tent city —

Mr P. Lilburne interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: This was before COVID hit, member. Maybe the member could listen and learn. Before the COVID pandemic, we had a tent city in Rockingham for two years.

Mr P. Lilburne interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I would ask you to desist from interjecting, please.

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

We had a tent city in the Premier’s own area for two years and—thank you for reminding me, member for Carine—the former member for Carine pointed this out to the Premier. I think it took two years before the Premier actually

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

went to visit it. That is how little he cared about something in his own electorate. Regardless of whether he is the Premier, and now the Treasurer, he is a local member. When any of us on this side hear that people are suffering hardship, we go and visit them. We go and sort out the problem. But we had a Premier who was too proud to do that.

I refer to an article on ABC online news on 30 May, which is very recent, titled “Housing rental ‘crisis’ entrenching West Australian tenants in ‘cycle of poverty’”. It is a dreadfully sad story of a lady who has lost her job and she now has nowhere to go. Again, she is a person, as well as everyone else, that the government is hitting with these increased charges.

We know that we will not see these iron ore prices forever, but, equally, the government has a golden opportunity to make structural reform. It was never intended that utilities would become massive cash cows for the government. We looked at the total across the forward estimates and it is over \$10 billion. Face it; it adds up to the government imposing a \$10 billion tax on families in this state. This is an opportunity for the government to progressively wean itself off—clearly, it would have to happen over a period of time—those higher fees and charges. We do have a massive dividend.

Sometimes I hear people on the left of politics talking about the need to tax businesses more and to reduce costs and taxes on ordinary people. Here is your golden opportunity, members. Use this windfall that the government enjoys now, and we expect it will enjoy for a period of time, to make the structural changes and reforms to freeze fees and charges in this state. Do not spin that the government is doing it for less than inflation, when it is in fact quoting an inflation figure that is simply wrong and is something that was developed in a budget paper over a year ago. The fact is that those fees and charges are significantly above the cost of inflation and there is no excuse for this government to increase them at all.

This government is sitting on a \$5 billion surplus. The Treasurer; Premier and members could use that surplus as a dividend to reward the people of Western Australia and to give those people who are struggling a little bit more dignity and allow them the opportunity to have a little more money in their pockets so they can cope. They would be less likely to be thrown out of their house because they cannot afford the increasing rentals, and they could live with dignity in their own house and afford a good quality of life.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.16 pm]: I rise to speak to this excellent motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition —

That his house condemns the McGowan Labor government for failing to deliver a community dividend from record iron ore royalties collected on behalf of the people of Western Australia, leading to failures in health, child care, mental health, child protection, disability services and housing, and an increase in household fees and charges.

The Leader of the Opposition outlined the case as to why the McGowan government has failed and why it should be condemned for that failure. The motion uses a very interesting choice of words: “community dividend”. What is the dividend to the people of Western Australia from this massive explosion of wealth that we have seen with the record iron ore prices and subsequent record iron ore royalties? We have in fact seen cost pressures applied to the average and ordinary people of Western Australia to the point that people who may have felt quite comfortable in their community and in their environment are now facing real hardship. As we know, and as we heard from the member for Cottesloe, the government has taken the approach to capitalise on the steep increases to costs that it brought to families over the last number of years, which are added to further cost increases in the forthcoming year, even though the government is aware that many people are already severely affected by increasing costs, especially in housing, and the associated hardship that that brings. It does not only affect people seeking a house; there are many ways that people are impacted by this.

The Department of Communities is charged with helping those people who are most in need. It is in charge of the housing portfolio and other important areas of service, such as providing for actions against perpetrators of family and domestic violence. Often in doing that, it employs contractors. One of the key roles that it should have filled, and where it is most at fault, is the situation in Narrogin where there was no caseworker for 18 months. The Minister for Community Services said today that she had taken action and was addressing that, but for that to have actually continued for 18 months is a disgrace.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister’s answer today went into a long list of things that she is spending money on, but it seemed that the minister had no touch with what is actually going on. There are a thousand young people who are vulnerable and at risk.

Mr V.A. Catania interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, I suggest that you show some respect as well.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister's department is charged with their care and protection, but it is letting them down. In the member for Roe's electorate, the Shire of Narrogin is a sizable community and it is the centre of a considerable number of smaller communities, yet the department has allowed the situation with the caseworker to happen. The minister referred to interactions with the media. We did not rush up here with something we heard in the media that day. There was a discussion with the union that represents workers in this industry as well.

Ms S.F. McGurk interjected.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The Minister for Child Protection keeps interjecting on the member for Moore. She has an opportunity to get up after the member for Moore and reply to what the member for Moore has said.

The SPEAKER: Member for North West Central, that is not a point of order; it is a point of view. It seems that you think you should be in the chair to give advice rather than me. I will say this though: minister, it is clear that the member on his feet does not want to take interjections. There are opportunities for other members to participate, and if they do not agree with what the member on his feet is saying, they have that opportunity later.

Debate Resumed

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

People who are at risk are being neglected and left behind in the boom. A further example of that is the homelessness situation. Today, the member for Central Wheatbelt, the Leader of the Opposition, asked a question of the Premier about the situation for homeless people. In his reply, the Premier said that pressures have been brought about by the return of expats from overseas because of the COVID pandemic and a change in the practice of fly-in fly-out, which has led to interstate workers being asked to reside in Western Australia. It is quite interesting because for a long time, we have been asking for FIFO workers to be resident in Western Australia—indeed, sometimes near the place of their employment—and to bring their families with them. We would never discourage that or consider it a negative, but the Premier seemed to be saying that somehow that is a problem when it is an opportunity. It is not an opportunity for the government to just throw its hands in the air and say, "It's too hard. We're going to suffer a homelessness crisis for quite some time." In fact, as I recall, the Premier said, "I can't magic houses up out of thin air." No, he cannot magic houses up out of thin air. The Premier criticised the grammar and language used by the member for Central Wheatbelt, but I do not think his use of language is appropriate there. We are not asking to magic houses out of thin air; rather, we are asking the government to put in place the types of programs that will address the very real issue of homelessness. Just this morning before I drove down Beaufort Street in Highgate, I read an article in *The West Australian* about fears of a new tent city on the horizon on Beaufort Street. The article contains a picture of many people sleeping rough on the footpath. I assume they come together for a sense of protection rather than being out there on their own. This is in the City of Perth, a city that is experiencing something of an economic boom, in a state that is awash with cash, yet while driving to Parliament today, I drove past that. That is a crisis, a disgrace and it has been going on for some time. There have been homelessness issues in Perth for the entire time that Labor has been in government but it has done very little to address it.

The member for Cottesloe pointed out that people in the Premier's electorate were living rough in the bush, a situation that was highlighted by the former member for Carine. In fact, the former member for Carine and I discussed the prospect of taking down second-hand caravans to those people, but because of liability issues, we decided that we could not do it. We were prepared to do it. We were prepared to do something for those people, whereas the Premier did nothing; he did not even go and visit those people, which is an indication of the callous disregard he has for those people suffering from homelessness at the moment. The government is sitting on a bucketload of money but is doing nothing to help these people. I admit that it takes time to build houses, but there must be other ways to source accommodation for these people. The government cannot provide everybody with a double-brick, three-bedroom house overnight but there are other ways to provide accommodation so that rangers do not have to move them on. We know that there are more temporary ways to safely accommodate these people so that they are not living in their car and driving from one place to another. I know that some people think that is a good idea when they are on holiday, but it is not a great idea for those who are trying to raise a family because living in a car means that they have nowhere to wash their children or cook their food. That is a shocking indictment on a rich and wealthy economy and a government that is presiding over that economy when that is allowed to occur.

We need to focus on ensuring that people have housing. It does not necessarily have to be the normal type of home that we have become used to, but in a crisis like this, we need to consider other ways of accommodating people in the short term while we go ahead and build the necessary homes. It is quite interesting that when governments of all persuasions have looked to invest in the community —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: There is no quorum. We are not sure why the bells are ringing.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

Mr R.S. LOVE: The bells are ringing for some people.

The SPEAKER: Thank you. We will go back to how we were and hear further from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

There are organisations to assist those types of people, not government organisations necessarily, but those that work with government and lobby on behalf of people who have hit more unfortunate times. Before the interruption with the quorum that was not a quorum, I was talking about the way that governments often concentrate on the need to build infrastructure. We need roads, hospitals, schools and houses, but we also need social infrastructure to provide for people's wellbeing. We know that there are people who have mental health issues being supported in the community. We have already discussed child care and family and domestic violence and the needs in those areas. I live in an electorate in which people often have to drive somewhere to access any sort of human services—outreach is very limited. It seems to me that when we think about infrastructure, we concentrate on those built things but we do not concentrate on the social infrastructure that makes many people's lives more replete and assists in ensuring that all children have a good foundation, get a good go in life, have a good education and have the opportunity to take their place. It is often harder to get politicians to take these types of investments seriously because there is no ribbon to cut and there is no big building they can look to and say, "I helped to build that stadium", or, "I helped to get that bridge underway." How much more rewarding would it be to say, "I helped to ensure that that generation of children got a decent education and that we live in a society in which everyone can access services that middle-class people who live in the middle of Perth take for granted"?

As a regional MP, I know that many people have to drive to services. I am not talking just about country towns that are hundreds of kilometres away from Perth; it can even be difficult to access a decent level of care and services in the outer metropolitan areas of Perth. Interestingly, many of the jobs in the care economy are filled by women, who are often the hardest hit when there are threats to employment and changes in hospitality and those sorts of areas. It would be a very far-sighted government that made the decision to directly invest in the future of the population in a way that addressed both the employment and care needs of its citizens.

We have seen royal commissions into aged care and there is currently a royal commission into people with disability. There is employment stress in the aged-care and disability sectors because people are overworked and underpaid. The people who are suffering are not only those who work in those roles, but also those who need these services. If we want to address the situation in aged care and the disability sector, we need more people working in those areas. Some of those matters are federal responsibilities and some are state responsibilities. We know that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to what might work for each population or region. We need an investment by government to ensure that there is sufficient human service delivery to the communities that we all serve.

I have had in my office for some time a publication put out by Anglicare; it is a little dated. It relates to investing in the care economy. It includes a little bit about the care economy and what it means. Nationwide, the amount of money that is spent on the care economy—looking after others—is about \$762 billion. That is an awfully large sector of the economy. It employs around 20 per cent of the Australian workforce.

When people face situations like those we see at the moment, including mental health stress, possible homelessness, falling victim to increased prices and an increased demand on services that make it hard to see a doctor or be admitted to hospital, we know that we probably need to invest more in the care economy generally, whether that be in health, aged care, disability services, care for young people who are experiencing family issues or care for women, especially those in domestic violence situations. We know there would be a huge dividend if we invested more in those things. We know that governments do not like doing it because it is hard to see an immediate result. Quite often, the dividends may occur in 15 or 20 years' time. In time, we might see fewer Aboriginal youth in care or fewer people moving into the justice system if we invested a little more in those people before they got to that point. I would really like to see more endeavour from the government to understand the true cost of doing nothing in those areas, the true cost of underinvestment in those areas and the true cost of lost opportunity.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would like to see the government make a very serious effort to get to the bottom of the opportunities that exist in those areas.

In the last Parliament, I sat on the Education and Health Standing Committee. In that committee, we saw the disparity, I guess, between opportunity and service delivery to people right throughout the state. We looked at the living conditions, for instance, of people in remote communities. We looked at education opportunities for people right around the state. We looked at the delivery of health services. We saw the stark difference, the disparity, that exists between the haves and the have-nots in our state. Regardless of political hue, I do not think anybody in this chamber would believe that there is any case for a child in a particular community, whether that be a remote community or an inner-city community, to have less opportunity than a child in another area. We all want everybody to at least

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

have an equal start in getting a decent education and living in a decent home environment. If people suffer from a disability, they should receive the necessary care. We need to ensure that older people in the community receive care. In doing so, we will provide employment opportunities for many other people; they may benefit from having an employment option. Quite often, people who are a bit older may be able to get part-time work in the care economy. Many people have life skills that would be well suited, with a little training, to situations in which people need care and supervision. It is not something that the Parliament spends enough time considering. How can we do things better to ensure that lives are better throughout the whole community?

I return to the Anglicare document and another interesting statistic. It states —

- Investment in the care economy generates more total employment, including indirect employment than investment in construction, especially for women and almost as much employment for men.

There is an opportunity to look beyond building freeways and schools et cetera, not that they are not important. We need schools, but we also need decent staff and we need kids to show up—we need their families to ensure that the kids go to school. It is not good enough to just have the schools; we have to invest in all those other things that wrap around that to make it work. If we look at investment in a particular built asset, whether it is a school, a hospital or a community resource centre, it is an investment in social capital. They are all investments in social capital. To make them work, we need to invest in the services that may be provided from them and into the communities that will benefit from them.

According to this document—I have no reason to doubt it; I do not think Anglicare would say anything that it could not defend —

- Every \$1m the government spends on education would create 10.6 direct jobs for women and 4.3 direct jobs for men, compared to every \$1m spent on construction which creates around 0.2 jobs for women and 1 job for a man.

Those multipliers that Anglicare quoted are significant in terms of the effect on the female workforce, which traditionally is most represented in the care economy. Education not only creates more jobs for women than men, but also probably matches the needs that we see in the community at the moment and were highlighted in the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, which highlights the failings of this government in providing a social dividend for the community and making sure that everybody in Western Australia shares in this boom. It is all very well for people who live near an area where there is going to be a significant capital investment; it is all very well for the Treasurer who is sitting on a bucketful of cash, making his job easy; but it is not all very well for those who live in an area that is distressed because the rents are going through the roof and there is no help for them. If someone is living in a car with two or three kids, more or less camping out because they do not have a home, the boom is not being spread around for them.

We would like the government to ensure that everyone in Western Australia shares in the dividends that are flowing from wealth that belongs to all the people of Western Australia, and not just a bunch of mining companies. We want all the people of Western Australia to be able to share in this. We find it ironic that a Labor government ignores the needs of the most vulnerable in the community. It is really quite ironic that although the government is composed of many union people and people who have come from community backgrounds and who in their past lives exhibited some degree of concern for these matters, on coming in here they are only interested in making the books balance and promising a new hockey ground or a new flash building of some sort. In the case of Collie, I believe the government is still planting petunias down the streets. What is it doing to address the very real distress of people in some parts of the state? What is it doing to ensure that every kid in this state has a decent start in life and is not one of the many thousands of at-risk children in the care of the Minister for Child Protection's department or in one of the towns where there are no caseworkers to look after them? In some towns, caseworkers are actually taking kids home to their own houses at night because there is nowhere else to take them. That is a disgrace and it needs to change. The government needs to invest the money that is flowing into the coffers back into a social and community dividend for the rest of Western Australia.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [5.41 pm]: I join the other members of the opposition in support of the Leader of the Opposition's motion —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government for failing to deliver a community dividend from record iron ore royalties collected on behalf of the people of Western Australia leading to failures in health, childcare, mental health, child protection, disability services and housing, and an increase in household fees and charges.

I will touch on the health portfolio at the conclusion of my speech, but I want to start with some issues that are very pertinent in the electorate of Vasse and are reflected right across Western Australia. These issues are highlighted in the very important portfolio of mental health.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

I recently had the privilege of joining 160 community members from the greater Busselton area for a walk in support of the program Shine a Light on Mental Health. It was led by the Man Walk Busselton, which is a group of gents who meet every fortnight to talk about mental health issues. It was also supported by people from the Blue Tree Project and Lifeline Australia. Many people gathered together on a wet Sunday in support of a community that is hurting at the moment after a number of youth suicides in the region in recent times. This obviously has a dramatic impact on a local community; it sends ripples through the community.

One of the organisers of the walk is Jon Eddy. He is a great mental health advocate in our community. He lost his son Alex in 2019. At the time he was told that over that 12-month period, 30 other youths across the south west had also taken their own lives. That is a quite astonishing figure. These statistics are very difficult to obtain, and we understand the reasons for that, but they are also certainly very difficult to comprehend.

Issues around mental health are reflected right across Western Australia, and it is a particular issue in regional WA. We recently held a forum with a number of community members and some really concerning statistics and feedback came out of that. We often hear about issues around acute care, and that issue is certainly alive and well here; for example, in the Busselton emergency department, the wait for a mental health bed can be often three to six days. We have heard of people staying in the emergency department for three to six days, waiting for mental health bed. That is obviously an unacceptable situation.

With regard to youth mental health beds, I understand that there are 15 at Fiona Stanley Hospital, 15 at Bentley Hospital and 15 at Perth Children's Hospital. These are very real concerns. With the support of the local community, we pushed for a psychiatric liaison nurse, who is now present at Busselton Health Campus. That is certainly a worthy investment in the hospital to ensure that there is a different culture of response, but there is a capacity issue there as well.

I met with stakeholders and advocates in the mental health community at our stakeholder meeting, and one of the most obvious and glaring issues is what is referred to as the "missing middle"—that is, the gap between the hospital and the home. There is a need to provide essential community-based support so that people who are vulnerable and feeling mentally unwell can have someone to talk to. There is a need for that level of support before things get too serious.

Unfortunately, since this government came to office in 2017, there have been some cruel cuts in that area. There have been cuts to Lamp Inc, a mental health service in Busselton. It provides funding for independent accommodation for homeless people. There have also been cuts to the GP down south organisation, which provided a three-tier program that supports youth with mental health issues in the Warren–Blackwood region. I will go through that. The former member for Warren–Blackwood made a grievance in this place either last year or the year before about the cruel cuts to this program. The program undertakes three things. As part of the first tier, awareness-raising exercises are held in classrooms and with large group cohorts of students. Tier two focuses on prevention and involves the presentation of workshops with local schools. The third tier of the program develops linkages between schools, practitioners and one-on-one counselling. It is a very worthy program and was well received in the Warren–Blackwood area. It was also successful in the Peel region and still continues there. I understand it was introduced in the Peel region in response to a spate of suicides there. The concern being raised with me is not only about the funding being cut in Warren–Blackwood, but also the need to invest in programs such as this in our schools to support the youth, who certainly need it. We know that if mental health support is provided early on, there is greater resilience in later life. According to the Telethon Kids Institute, 50 per cent of mental health disorders have already begun by 15 years of age and that increases to 75 per cent at 25 years of age. Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people in WA. This program has had runs on the board. As I said, it has been successful in the Peel region. It is a program we would like to see reinstated in schools in not only the Warren–Blackwood region, but also the Vasse region. In the Vasse electorate I am hearing from school nurses who are under significant pressure. They told me that their job has not been just about putting bandaids on grazed knees; it is about providing an important level of support. Many are burnt out. They are taking on a significant workload. They are under enormous pressure. There is a need for additional psychological support in schools.

As I stated, there is also a very good need for community support. It is a win–win for government, because community support groups—whether it is Lamp, GP down south or Radiance South West, which provides perinatal support—provide great bang for the buck for the government. They often provide voluntary hours. Radiance provides perinatal support to women in the south west region. It largely fundraises to provide this level of support. It has had a 50 per cent increase in referrals already this year, after five months. It is also locally connected. It knows its local community and it gets fantastic results. Western Australia's mental health community support budget is just 5.1 per cent of the mental health budget, which is less than the national average of nearly 6.5 per cent. There is a lack of investment in mental health prevention, with just \$4 million in new funds committed during the election campaign. The government has also not committed to any targets in this area.

Almost four per cent of the people presenting to an emergency department in WA—EDs have been a big focus over the last few weeks in this place—do so for a mental health issue, but 16.5 per cent are readmitted to an acute

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

specialised mental health bed within 28 days of discharge. Our target is less than 12 per cent. They are the most recent figures I have from the Western Australian Association for Mental Health. That is an extraordinary figure that illustrates the revolving door we are seeing with mental health presentations. It is certainly important to invest in our hospitals and emergency departments. We know they are currently buckling under pressure, not because of any great trend, but because the system is under-resourced and simply cannot cope with the lack of investment and capacity. It is also clear that we need to invest in community mental health programs and to look at a greater level of investment in mental health prevention. Our communities are relying on us to do that. That is the overwhelming feedback I am hearing from the community. That also touches on housing. The pressure on our schools is also quite significant.

I do not have a huge amount of time, so I will touch on the other areas of the portfolios I represent that relate to this motion, and one of those is disability services. We know that federally the National Disability Insurance Scheme supports over 48 000 people, and there are over 411 000 people with a disability in WA. Payments to the National Disability Insurance Scheme are expected to continue to grow. WA has seen a \$4.3 billion investment in this area. Although the federal government clearly has a role to play and the NDIS at least makes a lot of sense on paper, there have been some significant issues. It is fair to say that the previous government was working towards a more localised model and the previous Premier had made a decision to go ahead with that. In fact, the more localised WA NDIS My Way model was trialled in the lower south west region. The Capes region had the benefit of localised decision-making. It was somewhat disappointing that with the change of government, we saw the decision to go ahead with the national framework, which meant decisions about individuals here in WA and their support programs under the NDIS were instead made in Geelong. As I said, the principles of the NDIS certainly have merit. It is disappointing that we saw the shift to the more national Geelong model with the change of government, but going forward, the fact that the Disability Services Commission has effectively been dissolved within a mega-department is concerning. People with disabilities and their families are some of the most marginalised in our society. They are certainly very vulnerable.

I understand that a functional review into the role of disability services in the Department of Communities has been completed. It was in fact done some time ago. Some comments were made recently by the member for East Metropolitan Region in the other house, Hon Peter Collier. He had asked the Minister for Disability Services about the status of the functional review. I quote Mr Collier —

I have asked time and again about this functional review. In response to a question yesterday, the Minister for Disability Services said in part —

... the functional review of disability services was commissioned by government to inform decision-making on the type and level of residual disability services to be administered by the state once all eligible participants had transitioned to the commonwealth-administered National Disability Insurance Scheme. The review informed government's decisions as part of the 2020–21 budget.

According to the response I got from the minister yesterday, the review is finished. I repeat —

The review informed government's decisions ...

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L. METTAM: The Minister for Disability Services stated in his response that it was finalised as part of the budget process. What we know, and what is clear, is that the review has been finalised. There is a lot of anticipation from the disability sector about what that review will inform this sector. Although the National Disability Insurance Scheme provides funding to the individual, there is a gap and an opportunity to provide a greater level of support for families. There is a role for the state office of Disability Services to support families and workplaces and to provide that local level of support that is needed. There is no doubt that what was the Disability Services Commission was very much supported. It was introduced by former Liberal Premier Richard Court and it had great support from the disability services sector. It is disappointing to see that it has lost its strength and ability to support families in this way. That is what we would like to see, coupled with a level of investment in the disability services sector as well.

Unfortunately, at this stage little funding is attached to the state disability strategy. It would be good to see the disability strategy backed up with significant investment. We have heard a range of concerns from the community about a system that is currently in crisis. There are issues around the decision-making and some of those challenges that are part of the NDIS scheme, but an opportunity exists for the state to provide a level of support at the local and state level through the state government as well. In a region such as Vasse, which I represent, the situation has gone backwards. Not only did this government not take up the opportunity to invest in a more localised model for NDIS, but also we have seen the Disability Services Commission effectively dissolved within a mega-department. We know that the government is sitting on a strategy that it has not invested in and also a functional review that was done last year that it has yet to make transparent to the people in this sector.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

I will touch briefly on the health portfolio, which I have already spoken about in this place. I understand other members want to speak also. But again today we saw what a shambles this portfolio, which should be a priority for any state government, has been under this government's watch. Some elective surgery was suspended today. The waitlist has blown out by 50 per cent under this government's watch. We have record levels of ambulance ramping, which in some cases has tripled under this government, despite promises when it was in opposition to address and arrest these concerns. When the Labor Party was in opposition it called the Liberal government's health statistics a horror show. What we are seeing now is simply shocking. There are no more excuses. The reasons given have ranged from ambulance cleaning and mental health presentations, to COVID-19, when there was no community spread. The government needs to accept that we do have a crisis in our health system and to urgently address this crisis instead of opening up 117 beds in the short term. We need to see more than that. Our motion is all about the fact that this government has a capacity to show some heart to the vulnerable in our community. I have touched on those who are vulnerable at emergency departments. I have touched on those in the disability sector who have been let down by the decisions of the McGowan Labor government. In the mental health space across this state, including in regional communities, people are hurting from a government that is not just ignoring them, but has also made the audacious move to cut their funding. That is a very cruel move from the McGowan Labor government. I will leave my comments there.

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Child Protection) [6.04 pm]: I am keen to address some of the issues that have been raised because it is easy for people from the other side to sit there and say there are all these things that we need to do; that we need to just pour more money into what they describe at every turn as a crisis. However, what is more difficult is to apply good policy, a good evidence-based approach and some thought and collaboration, which they failed to do in the eight and a half years they were in government to address some of our difficult social issues. No-one denies we have those issues: as a state we are not alone in having people who are homeless, children in our child protection system who are victims of domestic violence, people with mental health challenges, or people with disabilities who need support. We are not alone in that at all. The challenge is getting the best sorts of responses and making sure we spend taxpayers' dollars responsibly and, as I said, doing that in collaboration.

Before I address some of those important social issues, I want to correct the member for Cottesloe when he talked about my vote in Fremantle going down and that I was the only MP on our side whose vote went down. If that is the understanding of members opposite about their voting system, it is no wonder they tanked so badly in the last state election. In fact, what happened is that my primary vote went up by six per cent, but because the Liberals did so badly, the two-party preferred vote is now between Labor and the Greens rather than Labor and the Liberal Party. Members opposite did so badly that it actually made me look bad too. I do not really appreciate that. The fact that the member for Cottesloe is so poor at reading the results is quite telling. I know he lives in a very privileged part of the state in Cottesloe but every now and again he might want to look a bit further afield. In my case, he just has to look over the Swan River and he might see that things are a little different there. I just wanted to correct the record. Across the state, nearly 10 per cent of the Liberal Party's primary vote went down anyway. The number of members sitting over there speaks for itself.

I will work through a number of issues. The member for Moore talked about the case in Narrogin and said that the union had advocated to him and the Leader of the Opposition that there were no child protection workers in Narrogin. That is not the case. I do not know whether he misunderstood them; I hope that was the case, otherwise he was misrepresenting the facts. What they do not have in Narrogin, because of a vacancy, is a family support officer. That is a level 1 person who takes people to appointments if contact visits and the like are required. It means we are not relying on skilled workers and highly paid workers to do some of the legal work that is required. It is true that because the person who was occupying the family support officer position was off doing other duties—I think perhaps related to COVID, although I could be wrong—that position had been vacant and they had not been able to fill it. As I said in question time, I am sorry if I bored members a little, because one of the things I was saying was that I was aware of those circumstances and I had asked the district to address it. In fact, the district had only realised recently, when the union raised it formally, that it was something that people were concerned about. In any case, it is not good. I understand that it is tough work that is done in the regions and throughout the whole child protection workforce. I do not want to underestimate the indebtedness on behalf of the state government. I thank the whole Western Australian community for the work they do and I want them to feel supported.

There are challenges because there are vacancies in the system. It is skilled and qualified work, and it is tough work. As a result, we have vacancies, particularly in regional areas, and we are working to address that. I want to send the message, particularly to our child protection workforce and to the Western Australian public, that it is not the case that there are no child protection workers in Narrogin. That is inaccurate. That is why I was interjecting while the member for Moore was on his feet.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

Ms S.F. McGURK: I have just explained why you were inaccurate and you seem to have just woken up. I was saying you were wrong. You were giving me a quizzical look similar to my dog, Doug.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am sitting here; I am not seeking to be attacked. Why is the minister —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Member for Moore, it is not a point of order; however, I will ask the minister to continue her comments on the topic at hand.

Debate Resumed

Ms S.F. McGURK: I apologise to the member for Moore. He was giving me a quizzical look not unlike the one that my dog, Doug, gives me sometimes. With a turn of his head and a quizzical look, I thought he had not been listening to me. There are child protection workers in the Narrogin office doing good work and they are supported. In fact, what I said in question time is that since coming to office in 2017, we have increased the child protection workforce by 307 staff. More than half of those, 158 of them, are frontline staff. There are support workers as well, which is the other half.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr D.R. Michael: Pipe down, mate!

Ms S.F. McGURK: Thank you to whoever is asking the member to pipe down. I could not agree more.

We are spending money, we are putting more people on the front line and it is starting to show some good dividends. The number of children in the child protection system has gone down. Early figures in the March quarter show that for the first the time total number of children in care and the total number of Aboriginal children in care has gone down. That is not the only metric we need to use, but it is a sign of the work that we are doing by providing significant new money to early intervention and engaging in important partnerships with the community sector. We are also trying to support the workforce itself. They do fantastic work and we are very indebted to them. That is evidence of the sort of work that we are doing that is partly about putting the resources in and also supporting additional staff and extra dollars along with applying innovation and evidence-based approaches. That is the sort of approach we are also taking across in our work with vulnerable families.

I hope the member was listening to the amendments to the act. We went through that in the previous Parliament and I know that the member for Moore led the debate from his side on that. Those amendments have had some changes and have been updated, so I look forward to debating that here. I have also announced an Aboriginal family-led decision-making pilot. Those pilots will be in Geraldton, the Gascoyne and the midwest. I had a very positive meeting up there with some of the Aboriginal-controlled organisations as well as the district staff in the Department of Communities who are really keen to work in partnership to make sure that they can get some good results for those local families who need our best efforts. I also mentioned in question time the \$30 million in funding for early intervention support in Aboriginal-controlled organisations. We are working to provide some dedicated assistance to families that are at risk of coming into the child protection system. Again, the early work that has been done by organisations such as the Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and its consortium are showing some very good results, particularly with reunification and early intervention. That is heartening.

The Department of Communities has also implemented a specialist child protection unit. We committed to that last year and we are starting to do that work to make sure that it will look at best practice across other jurisdictions not only in our region in Australia, but also around the world. It will look at what the evidence shows are the best ways to support vulnerable families and our First Nations people to genuinely devolve some of the decision-making and control over making sure that women and children are safe, and that the perpetrators are held to account. There will be genuine change to and ownership of some of that work. I know this is not easy work. We are trying to reform big systems. The specialist child protection unit is a good opportunity for us to look at doing some of that using innovation and research and with the support of implementing good professional practice in the department and our community services sector. We are looking at ways we can better support our foster carers, for instance. We have so many foster carers around the state who do amazing and difficult work. Although I hear a lot of good stories, at times they feel they do not get the support that they need. I do everything I can to make sure that they feel heard and that we work with the districts and our community partners to address their concerns.

I was really pleased with some of our election commitments that will be life changing for many people in the child protection system, particularly the commitment around what is called Homestretch. That is a \$37.2 million commitment to make sure that children in the child protection system will be supported formally from the ages of 18 to 21. We have been doing a trial of Homestretch in partnership with Anglicare that is due to report later this year. We have made a financial commitment to make sure that children at 18 years who are in the child protection system do not have their support artificially pulled away. In the act now there is an ability for those young people to ask for support and they are given some services, including some links in with some professional support, but

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

not the practical support of having foster carer payments reimbursed and not to the same level of support that Homestretch will commit to. It is a significant investment and one that the government, which I am very proud to be part of, was prepared to make.

Another election commitment we made is to grandcarers. We committed that a re-elected Labor government would triple the cash payment for the average grandcarer family. Many people in this house have a relationship with some of the grandcarer advocates, if not individual grandcarer families, in their electorate. We know how difficult it is for those families. Aunts and uncles and the like, but often grandparents who did not realise that in their later years they would be dealing with bringing up in some cases babies, toddlers or young children, or, what is worse, teenagers, are having to manage and navigate the life of a teenager while they are in their senior years. Often they have the trauma and difficulty of managing their own children who are the reason their grandchildren have come into their care. Their children may have mental health issues or be incarcerated or they might have died. There are a lot of reasons that people either do not want or are not able to go into the formal child protection system. They are not given the same sort of support that the formal child protection system affords foster carers and formal kinship carers; nevertheless, they need support. We hear that, we understand their requirements and in the new member for Nedlands, Katrina Stratton, we have someone whose research specialty and work before coming into this place was supporting grandcarers. I know she is very aware of the situation and is a passionate advocate of the cause, as are other members of this place, including the members for Kingsley, Wanneroo, Joondalup and Mandurah. I see the member for Geraldton nodding her head. They have all had strong, longstanding relationships with grandcarers and representative organisations in their electorates.

Under the proposed scheme, we will give grandcarers or kinship carers payments transitional to an annual means tested payment as an equal \$1 000 payment for each child. This represents a significant increase for the one-off payment for the first child, which is currently \$400. The average family at the moment receives a \$650 payment, comprising \$400 for the first child and \$250 for each child after that. It is a significant increase. The average two-person-grandparent family will get \$2 000. That is on top of the one-off payment of \$500 or more that we gave those families during the COVID-19 pandemic and the \$600 000 that we gave to Wanslea Family Services to deliver a suite of programs and services to grandcarers, including in-home support, mentoring, and peer networking and tutoring for children.

I also want to talk about the early childhood sector because many opposition members spoke about the lack of assistance to regional areas. The member for Central Wheatbelt is aware of the organisation Regional Early Education and Development and the good work that it has done. In fact, it began under the previous Liberal-National government and we have supported it to its fruition. The early childhood education and care work was done with the regional community childcare development fund. In 2018, we gave \$811 000 to that program for the creation of a central agency that employs appropriately qualified staff. There was then a transition to over 20 single-entity services that follow a similar model to community-based child care. We now have 22 locations throughout the wheatbelt region that provide early childhood education and care. That would not have been the case previously. It is a really innovative model and it has been very successful. I would particularly like to acknowledge Helen Creed, the chairperson of the REED board, but many people throughout those communities have done great work to help establish and then support this model. It has received funding from the government but the idea is that it will eventually be self-sustaining. I know that created some angst for people in those communities as they transitioned to the new model but, as I said, 22 locations in the wheatbelt now have access to early childhood education and care services that many of them would not have had without support from the REED model doing the hard yards under this government. It is a great model.

I will also briefly talk about Target 120. Target 120 is a McGowan government election commitment from 2017. In 2018–19, we delivered on that commitment with \$20.4 million. Target 120 is being implemented across 11 metropolitan and regional sites where we have either a Department of Communities officer or an Aboriginal-controlled organisation that is employed to work with young people who are aged between 10 and 15 years. Since its fruition, it has supported 90 clients and there are currently 51 active participants. The spin-off from that has been that 317 family members, including siblings, are also being supported as part of the program. The significance of Target 120 as an early intervention justice program is that 50 per cent of the young people engaged in it have had no further police contact since joining the program. That is not to be underestimated. For these young people, all the analysis and criminogenic factors indicated they would almost certainly increase their interactions with the youth justice system and, tragically, probably end up in detention. We know that once they are in detention, it is very difficult for young people to see alternatives. To have 50 per cent of those young people who joined the program have no further police contact is significant.

Target 120 connects at-risk young people with services that meet their individual needs while supporting their whole family. It is clearly creating better outcomes for participants and their families, including fewer contacts with police and improved school attendance rates. Target 120 has also helped to create safer communities and more connection

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

to communities by addressing factors that increase a young person's likelihood of offending and antisocial behaviour including substance abuse, domestic violence, trauma, mental health issues and poor attendance at school. I think the program should get a lot more attention because of the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the youth justice and adult corrections system. Two-thirds of people involved in Target 120 are Aboriginal. A number of these sites are across regional areas, so I hope members are listening. They are working very proactively with some of the most at-risk families. It has been a really positive program that I am proud to have implemented. The analytics that sit behind the program are also significant. We can start to track not only the expected poor life outcomes of these young people who are risk on their current path, but also the poor social and personal outcomes. Sending them into the justice system is also an expensive model that has poor individual outcomes. We hope to demonstrate through Target 120 that this is not only improving their life and social outcomes, but also is money well spent. It is a cost-effective model as well. We are doing the work to analyse the data analytics that underpin Target 120.

I also want to briefly address the disability issues raised by the member for Vasse. She said that she was disappointed that the National Disability Insurance Scheme was not delivering for a number of people in the disability system. I did not once hear her call on the federal government to produce a better outcome with the NDIS—not once. All her comments were about the state government. All her comments on disability outcomes were that the state government has to produce more and has to duplicate the federal system that we pay for. I think that is the sort of narrowmindedness and myopic approach to social services that people see through. They understand that her criticisms and her understanding of how we deliver better outcomes does not take into account the federal government's responsibility when we opted to move into the NDIS system. I know that the current Minister for Disability Services understands that well. He is the perfect minister to be tackling this area. He has a solid background in social services, he is connected to his own community and I know that he will be a great representative and will advocate to the federal government for the needs of community members, including people with disabilities in regional areas.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean — Minister for Water) [6.27 pm]: I rise to make a few comments about the water portfolio, given that the member for Cottesloe had a bit of a crack during question time and then, for some reason, had another go during this debate at how the —

Dr D.J. Honey: You've had time to regret the error of your way, minister!

Mr D.J. KELLY: Yes, that is right.

The member for Cottesloe had another crack at the way we have handled this issue, so I want to go through this in a bit more detail. The previous Liberal–National government was ruthless in the way it dealt with water pricing during the eight and a half years it was a government. As I said in question time, each year it handed down increases in water fees in excess of inflation. It had four water ministers in eight years, which shows how little regard it had for the portfolio. Each year, it increased the price of water by more than the rate of inflation. In its second year, the increase was 10.8 per cent. That was followed by increases of 8.5 per cent, 6.6 per cent, 5.2 per cent, 4.5 per cent and 4.5 per cent, for a total increase in water prices of 66 per cent. The absolute gall of members—I will not say members opposite, I will say members in the corner!—to criticise us for increasing water prices for the next financial year by the rate of inflation, or under two per cent, is extraordinary. Given the opposition's history in this matter, it really is quite extraordinary. In the last budget, water prices actually went down, which is absolutely unheard of. For opposition members to come in here and criticise us just shows how out of touch they are. It is a case of crocodile tears from those in the corner when it comes to households.

As I mentioned in question time, the opposition ramped up water prices and we saw a steep increase in the number of families who had their water reduced to a trickle because they could not pay their bills. I raised that in this chamber time and again. The former Minister for Water, the current Leader of the Opposition, did nothing about it. Annually, 2 500 families were getting their water cut off because they could not pay their bills. Over 50 weeks of the year, about 10 families each working day were having their water cut off because they could not pay their bills. When we came to government and I became the Minister for Water, one of the first things that I said to the Water Corporation was that it had to deal with that differently. For the Water Corporation, it was a change of culture because its staff had literally been told that if people did not respond to bills, the way to attract their attention was to cut off their water. People then had to do something; they would ring the Water Corporation and then there might be a discussion about the alternatives people had, as far as hardship payments and the like, to clear their debts.

I told the Water Corporation that I wanted it to come up with a better way and to be more proactive so that people could still pay their bills and the Water Corporation did not have to go through the brutality of cutting off a family's water. The member for Cottesloe, might want to listen to this. I had the financial counselling organisation in my electorate talk to me about just how humiliating it is for families to suddenly not have a normal water supply and not be able to wash the kids' clothes for school or bath the children—all those things that a family goes through when they have their water reduced to a trickle because they cannot pay their bills. None of that humiliation or hardship

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

had any impact on the former government. There was a steep increase in the number of families who had to put up with that. Despite having raised the issue with the former government multiple times in this house, those four water ministers, and the last water minister in particular, did nothing about it.

When I raised the issue with the Water Corporation, it was not long before it came up with another approach. It went out and interviewed customers experiencing hardship to find out what the issues were, why they were finding it difficult to pay their bills and how the Water Corporation could deal with it differently. The Water Corporation actually went out and talked to people and learnt a lot. It came up with a whole bunch of different practices. When the Water Corporation could see that people were having difficulty paying their bills, it proactively tried to contact them before the bill got to almost a point of no return. By being proactive, it was able to significantly reduce the number of households for whom, as a last resort, water was cut off. Within a relatively short period of time, prior to the COVID pandemic, we reduced the number of people for whom the last resort was utilised from 2 500 a year to below 800. That is almost a 70 per cent reduction.

I have two interesting things to say about that. The staff at the Water Corporation have said to me that going through the process of talking to their hardship customers and putting in place a whole bunch of new procedures was the best thing they have done in their working life. They found it really rewarding, because they now understand their customers better and are able to help people in advance of their bill situation getting to the point of no return. First, it was really rewarding for Water Corporation staff. Second, the chair of the Water Corporation told me the other day that the Water Corporation now spends less on debt recovery than it did when it took the hard approach of cutting off people's water. It is not an inexpensive process. It had to send a technician out to cut the water off. It had to deal with the angry, upset customer on the phone. It had to try to resolve the issue. It then had to send a technician back out to turn the water back on, and there is a fee involved in doing that.

The Water Corporation now spends less on debt enforcement for hardship customers by taking a more sensible and compassionate approach than it did when it took a hardline approach. Therefore, it is better for the customers, it is better for the staff and it is financially better for the Water Corporation. Now, how hard is that? It just took a government that was sincere about dealing with hardship customers rather than the crocodile tears that we have seen from the members in the corner today. Those members really did not care when they were in government, and they still really do not care. On this side, we do care.

I mentioned two programs that were introduced as a result of the conversations Water Corporation staff had with hardship customers. The staff came back and said that there were a bunch of customers who get into hardship because home dialysis treatment and incontinence issues lead to huge water bills, and that we should do something for those two groups of customers. We tackled the dialysis issue first. I think there are about a hundred customers who are doing home dialysis and who receive a special water allowance of 30 000 litres for every bimonthly bill. That is free water so that they can have home dialysis and not end up with a huge water bill. We also expanded the medical assist program so that if people have an incontinence issue, they now also get a reduced bill. We announced that in the last six months. I did not dream up either of those things; they came about because the Water Corporation actually went out and talked to its staff.

Another program is called Start Over. Water Corporation found that it had customers who might have, for example, a leak that they did not know about and whose bills all of a sudden went through the roof. Because they are on modest incomes, they are not in a position to clear that one bill. They can go on paying their regular bills each month, but they are never in a position to clear that big debt. Therefore, we put in place Start Over. Essentially, that means that if a person has a one-off debt that they cannot clear and they can show that they were a good payer for two years, we will clear that historical debt. The alternative is that we cut off people's water or take them to court over a one-off historical debt, for which the enforcement probably costs more than the debt itself. It is not a financial win for the corporation to behave like that. It is financially better for the corporation to get people back onto regular bill payments and to write off the old debt, and it really is more humane for someone who is in hardship, so that is another thing that we did.

We can suspend bill payments under the Time Assist program. If something goes wrong—for example, someone is made redundant, is temporarily out of work or has an injury that interrupts their income—they can suspend their payments. That is another thing that we introduced to assist customers. We have done a whole range of things. People are still paying their bills, but we are not cutting off their water, which is an unpleasant and harsh thing to do, but under the previous government, it was almost like the first resort. People in the corner should hang their heads in shame for allowing that situation to continue for as long as it did. It stopped only because there was a change of government.

Regarding the dividends that we return to the people of Western Australia, one of the areas in which the Water Corporation is different under this government compared with how it was under the previous Liberal–National government is that it is tackling climate change. Those members who have carried on may have heard me speak

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

about this before, but for the information of new members, under the previous government, government agencies such as the Water Corporation were not allowed to use the term “climate change” in their documentation. They could refer to the changing climate or the drying climate, but they could not talk about climate change because the previous government —

Ms M.J. Davies: What a load of rubbish.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I am glad that the previous Minister for Water is listening. She was pretending not to listen to all the other stuff about hardship —

Ms M.J. Davies: I am trying to not listen, but your voice penetrates.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is what your eardrum is for; sound is meant to penetrate.

The previous government would not let agencies talk about climate change. I have not heard that from just the Water Corporation or single public servants; I have heard that from multiple agencies and multiple public servants. They said, “If we put up briefing notes that talked about climate change, they got sent back and we had to rewrite them.” We are dealing with climate change in the water portfolio in a way that the previous government never did and that is largely because the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA are governed by climate sceptics. There are people who do not believe that climate change is true. I know that he is not in Parliament, but he still holds a position of spiritual high regard in the Liberal Party. I am talking about Wilson Tuckey, a former federal Liberal member, and I heard him on 6PR today. Apparently, he has a regular spot on 6PR—Wilson Tuckey of all people! He gets to talk on 6PR about things that bug him. This morning he talked about being irritated by the Water Corporation’s advertising. “Millsy” said, “They are talking about encouraging people to switch their sprinklers off and save water. Isn’t that a good thing?” Millsy asked him some probing questions. Wilson Tuckey said—this is what it boiled down to—“I really don’t like them talking about climate change.” I could tell that he was really annoyed that the Water Corporation’s advertisements now mention climate change. Is that not typical of opposition members in the corner? They really do not believe that it is an issue. At the federal level, they have got their head in the sand and in our state Parliament, they never did a thing. What was the climate change strategy in the Water Corporation portfolio when members opposite were in government? They never talked about it, they never acknowledged it and they did nothing about it. The last two water ministers were National Party ministers. Their heartland —

Point of Order

Dr D.J. HONEY: I refer to standing order 94, which states that a member’s speech must be relevant to the question under discussion. It might be an interesting general topic, but it bears no relationship —

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Point of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Yes, Leader of the House.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Mr Acting Speaker, I am still standing. The Leader of the House cannot stand while I am standing.

Mr D.A. Templeman: It is not a point of order.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is a point of order. Under standing order 94, a member’s speech must be relevant to the question under discussion.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Leader of the House! There is no point of order, but I ask the minister to make sure that he comes back to the topic of the motion.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.T. Punch: It’s a very intelligent contribution that the minister is making.

Mr D.J. KELLY: That is right. I thank the member the Bunbury for his interjection; I will take that!

As I understand, this motion is about the government not delivering a dividend to the people of Western Australia. One of the dividends that we are delivering is taking action on climate change. In the wheatbelt and the great southern, which could be described as the National Party heartland, even though more people in the Agricultural Region of the upper house voted for the Labor Party at the last election than they did the National Party by quite a long stretch, we have done more to deal with climate change impacts than the previous Liberal–National government ever did. We have had 12 water deficiency declarations, the most on record. We have spent over \$3 million on carting water to farmers in the wheatbelt. We have funded 37 community water projects—I hope this is getting through, Leader of the Opposition—worth over \$1.5 million to increase the size of those projects so that farmers have somewhere else to get non-potable water when their on-farm water supplies are depleted. We have pursued that program and

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

spent that money since we have been in government in a way that you never did. The only program for farmers in that region that you have supported is subsidies for individual farmers.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: I never understood —

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

Mr D.J. KELLY: Get up and say something! Get up and say something, if you want, Leader of the Opposition. I am glad you are listening.

The individual subsidies that you have sought for individual farmers: it was of some surprise to me to find out that one of the reasons you were so wedded to that program is that the member for Roe was actually an applicant for that program. He stood to financially gain from that program.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: The minister is referring to a matter that was the subject of deliberation by the former Speaker, who found that the member for Roe acted without malice and was cleared of any implication of wrongdoing by the previous Speaker. I ask the minister to reflect on that before he tries to besmirch the member any further.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Minister for Water, you might want to consider revisiting your comments.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.J. KELLY: Mr Acting Speaker, I am just stating the facts; I am not putting any implications on the member for Roe that he breached the standing orders. I am not making that allegation at all. I am simply stating the fact that in his championing of that program, he was a financial beneficiary. I understand that he has withdrawn his application for that program, which he is entitled to do.

We have spent money in the wheatbelt and the great southern to improve the water supply for farmers in need in a way that members opposite absolutely never did. We put forward a \$7.3 million program to improve 70 dams in the wheatbelt and the great southern. We put forward \$3.65 million of state money and we have asked the commonwealth to kick in the other half through its National Water Grid program. That is a program that so far, I have not heard members opposite support, and we have not secured federal funding. If they care about a dividend and dealing with climate change for farmers, it would be nice to hear members in the corner support that program.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [6.48 pm]: I would like to take this opportunity in the last 10 or 15 minutes to run through some of my concerns. I certainly support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house condemns the McGowan Labor government for failing to deliver a community dividend from record iron ore royalties collected on behalf of the people of Western Australia leading to failures in health, child care, mental health, child protection, disability services and housing, and an increase in household fees and charges.

This motion relates to the social dividend. It has been quite interesting to listen to some of the arguments. Members on this side of the house are trying to translate what is happening out in the community; that is what this is all about.

The people of WA voted in the Labor government; we all understand that. As the member for Moore said, we would have thought, in general terms, that a Labor left socialist-type government would be interested in social and community issues concerning their constituents. It is quite concerning to me that the people of Western Australia are sitting back and saying, “We voted in the Premier, he kept us safe, he kept us strong.” I saw the Labor candidate at the Esperance polling booth many times, only a metre in front of me, telling people to vote for Mark McGowan, “He’s keeping you strong.” I said to him, “What about voting for me?” He was a candidate. What about voting for me?

Mr D.A. Templeman: He did very well. Brad did a good job.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: He did. Bradley did very well. Anyway, I survived to fight another day, minister.

The concern is that the people of WA voted the Premier in and now they are sitting back and saying, “With a \$5 billion surplus, we have all these social issues.” The Leader of the Opposition is exactly right: the people of WA are looking for the social dividend. We have these concerns. The shadow Minister for Health raises these health concerns every day. Today we asked a question about category 3 surgery. The Minister for Health almost laughed it off. We have seen an increase in the number of category 2 and 3 surgeries that are on hold. It has gone from 19 000 surgeries up to 29 000. The shadow Minister for Health asked a question today and the health minister

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

thought it was some sort of joke. I do not think it is a joke for all those category 3 patients who are out there waiting for surgery. I was quite disappointed to see that today.

Education is my shadow portfolio, member for Mandurah, and I have some real concerns. As I said last week, if we happen to run across Hon Darren West and some of his cohort in the general electorate, we might be able to pick up some sort of package or grant. I have one for him—Esperance Senior High School. It is a fantastic school. Its results for a regional senior high school are among the best in the state. That has been well recognised for over 20 years. The week before last, I was with Pene Pariagh, the P&C and the board, walking around this school. It was quite upsetting to see the state of the infrastructure there. We have a real opportunity to look at these types of infrastructure while the government has this \$5 billion surplus. The thing that probably upset me the most was the dark and dingy canteen. I could not imagine what it is like in the middle of winter. Those students come up with such great results, and basically two-thirds of the school needs bulldozing. We are looking at a 1960s school. Today I saw another press release headed “McGowan Government building better schools in Perth’s south”. That is fantastic. The member for Baldivis was at Ridge View Secondary College today. The media release states —

Stage 2 of construction includes a new performing arts theatre and associated learning areas for drama, dance, music, visual arts and media; two new classroom blocks; a cafe for teaching purposes; and additional student services offices.

I am pleased for the students and the families of Baldivis, but, to be honest, the students and families of Esperance deserve something better. I hope the minister will be advocating for that because I certainly will be. I will be reminding Hon Darren West, Hon Shelley Payne and the like that Esperance is in their electorate and they need to look after that school. I want to point out that it is not just about Perth schools.

Mr D.A. Templeman: I think you’ll find that the new members down that way will be very good representatives.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: They do a fantastic job under difficult conditions.

I also want to talk about Hedland Senior High School. I believe nothing would have happened there were it not for the National Party going to Port Hedland a year or two ago under the leadership of the now Leader of the Opposition. I had a look at the high school and I came back and asked a question of the Premier about the state of that school, where about two-thirds of the children at that school cannot access any shade in the Port Hedland heat at recess or lunch. I said to the principal that there would be some heat coming from the government when I asked this question. He said, “No, you go for your life! I am nearly retired now. If they retire me early for allowing you to ask this question, well, so be it!”

Mr D.A. Templeman: I think he’s still there!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The member for Pilbara is nowhere to be found. Finally, we got it on the front page of the *North West Telegraph* and, funnily enough, it appeared on the front page of *The West Australian*. Now, when we finally got some funding for Hedland Senior High School, unfortunately, Pindan was doing the job!

The children and the families involved with Hedland Senior High School really need the minister’s support. I really look forward to that. This has been on the radar. Now that we have had the unfortunate situation with Pindan, the government needs to step up to the plate.

We also have issues with the likes of asbestos around the region. This is a real scenario, member for Central Wheatbelt, out there at the college in Merredin. I have been to several briefings over time and we are working through that issue.

Mr D.A. Templeman: Which college?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is K–12 at Merredin College, which certainly has excellent staff and is a good scenario for that town. This is the time, when the government has a \$5 billion surplus coming up, to start replacing infrastructure. So many of our senior high schools and primary schools around the regions and in places like Churchlands use transportable buildings, and there is asbestos in different places. The government has a massive dividend coming up and a massive surplus, so this is the time to look at these issues. I wanted to refresh the minister’s memory on that.

Another issue came up in my electorate in the last few weeks. I was out at the Munglinup Primary School. Munglinup is a small town, but we had about a hundred people turn up to a public meeting. That school only has a small number of students, but its numbers will increase by 40 to 50 per cent over the next few years. What is happening? The school bus service is cutting back school buses. This is another issue. We seem to have spot fires starting everywhere. We do not have equity with our children getting equitable access to education. This was flagged by the ABC in Esperance after the meeting at Munglinup. There is also an issue with telecommunications, but the inequity of school bus services was of real concern.

I want to move quickly to a scenario with housing over the last four years. This government loves referring to the previous Liberal–National government. Labor has been in government for nearly four and a half years and it is

Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Acting Speaker; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Shane Love;
Speaker; Ms Simone McGurk; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr David Templeman; Mr Peter Rundle

time it took responsibility, because it cannot spend the next four years, as it has spent the last four years, blaming the previous government.

Dr D.J. Honey: They could!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I know that, and they probably will from the way they are going. At some stage, member for Cottesloe, they have to take responsibility.

We have a Premier who stood up today in question time and said, “More houses than ever! The state’s going fantastically!” But he has failed to mention the thousand-odd social housing houses that were disposed of over the last four years of his government. There are any number of towns in my electorate and in the electorates of all regional members here that just do not have housing. When Nyabing gets a new principal at the school, people say, “Oh, sorry. We can’t find a house for you.” For new police in Wagin it is the same. The Minister for Police tells us that there will be 950 new police officers over the next four years, but they will have nowhere to live. These are the issues that the government has to address over the next three and a half years.

Another thing relating to the social dividend that really upsets me is our magistrate shortages. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned today the real concerns we have about the shortage of magistrates in our court system. By the way, today I congratulated the member for Baldivis on his better half being appointed as a new magistrate. That is great news for the system in WA, but I think it is something that this government needs to address urgently, because we are having difficulties with a number of cases.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.