

**STATE BUDGET 2023–24 — FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS**

*Motion*

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: After that overwhelming vote of confidence that we should proceed, I move —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

This debate is an opportunity for members of the opposition to outline the very many failures in the government's budget process over the last six years insofar as things are announced but rarely get delivered on time. It is the government's failure to actually deliver programs that is of most concern. The government has also failed to meet the standard of transparency that it promised it would introduce if it won the 2017 election. When in opposition, government members sat on this side of the chamber and complained about the former government's lack of transparency. They have now moved to the government benches. What do we see? The McGowan Labor government is itself an affront to democracy. The government went to an election saying that it would not seek to change representation in the upper house, but we know what happened there. We have witnessed an extraordinary level of arrogance over the last six years. In just about every portfolio, this government has failed to listen to the people of Western Australia, show interest or take on board people's lived experience to inform its policies. We know that the government is not interested in the expertise of people in local areas because it completely stripped away local decision-making and input in areas such as the development commissions, which under the previous government had a great deal to offer in providing information to government about the priorities for local regions. Instead, the government wants to centralise decision-making for those areas in Perth. The government does not listen to our opinion or the public's opinion and, increasingly, it seems to be ignoring what the Auditor General says. Increasingly, the Auditor General is coming out with some rather damning findings on this government's performance in many areas.

Government members of this place have expressed to me that these Wednesday sessions are nothing but "whingeing Wednesday". Whingeing is complaining about something that is not important. We raise issues of great importance to the people of Western Australia, and it is a disgrace that government members consider that to be us whingeing. It is not whingeing; we are doing our job of bringing to this place examples of this government's many failures, including on transparency and the very many broken promises in that regard.

The government has been spending money with abandon, including half a billion dollars on rapid antigen tests, many of which will probably end up on the rubbish heap. We know there was no strategy in place to justify that enormous expense because it was outlined by the Auditor General. She expressed concern in that area. It was also outlined by members of Parliament. When the announcement first became public, the opposition expressed concern about the amount of money being spent. We now know that two government departments were competing with each other to find RATs. It was a monumental waste of time and money. As the Auditor General put it, the money expended was twice the cost of the Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus redevelopment. Twice the cost of the Bunbury Hospital redevelopment was wasted on that program. The amount expended would be probably a quarter of the funding required for the proposed women's and babies' hospital.

The government completely dismissed concerns raised in this place by members of the opposition about the sale of the Landgate building at Midland. It sought to downplay any concerns about the process involved in that sale and failed to outline what had happened and where it had gone wrong. The Auditor General has now identified that the sale was a substantial deviation from the published market-led proposals policy. An article on this issue by Hamish Hastie published on 6 January states —

The public sector watchdog has put the state government on notice it will investigate other projects progressed through a controversial government bidding process known as market-led proposals after identifying significant issues with the sale of Midland's Landgate building.

...

The government maintains that modelling suggests taxpayers will be \$12 million better off under the deal by avoiding refurbishment, fit-out and maintenance costs, but Spencer found that decision-makers didn't have all the information about the value of the sale before it was approved.

"Most significantly the net lettable area and rent rates, both of which were critical inputs to the value for money assessment, were still to be negotiated when the deal was conditionally approved," she said.

...

"The final decision makers were therefore not provided all the information relevant to considering final value for money of the arrangement."

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That was never revealed in this place when we asked questions about it. An officer of the Parliament has outlined that that was a clear failure in terms of transparency and process, and I commend her for her work in bringing such matters to notice. Other controversial market-led proposals were mentioned in that article. One is the Swanbourne train station and another is the Fremantle film studio. An article of 11 October 2021 titled “Lights, camera, election: How Labor danced around ‘caretaker mode’ for Freo film studio promise” says —

Freedom of Information documents reveal the McGowan government told the Department of Finance to hold off on announcing the developer for the major project, which still has no finalised contract.

The documents show then—finance minister Ben Wyatt’s office requested the department disclose that —  
A certain group —

... had been selected through the government’s market-led proposals process as the preferred developer on February 19—right in the middle of the election caretaker period, when major government decisions are put on hold.

Again, there was a conspiracy, if you like, to release that information in the middle of an election campaign. It was preset before the election and caretaker mode by the former Minister for Finance. It was something quite the opposite with the Cedar Woods development. I refer to the *WAtoday* article of 15 March 2021 with the headline, “Saffioti knew about Swanbourne Apartment proposal ‘months’ before election”, which says —

Planning Minister Rita Saffioti knew about a proposal to build a high-density development near Swanbourne train station months ago but denied an agreement was struck to hold off any public announcement until after the election.

Speaking to 6PR’s Liam Bartlett on Tuesday, Ms Saffioti said she became aware of a proposal by property developer Cedar Woods to build a 300-apartment, 10-storey development on Crown land adjacent to the Swanbourne station “a number of months ago”.

The plans were submitted to the state government through its market-led proposals process, which allows unsolicited bids from private enterprise to the government.

Bids are assessed by a Department of Finance steering committee, which then makes recommendations to the government.

*WAtoday* understands public announcements were put on hold until after the election to avoid politically difficult questions about high density and Labor’s relationships with developers but this is vehemently denied by Ms Saffioti’s office.

That is as it was reported. Apparently the minister did know beforehand. We again see this murky uncertainty around transparency and we do not get the straight answers that we should be getting from a government that is committed to being transparent. That shows that this government believes that parliamentary processes, parliamentary accountability, the work the opposition does, our representation of our constituents and the concerns of Western Australians amounts to nothing but whingeing. We are being told that, yet we understand that the issues we bring here are important issues and they need important consideration by those opposite.

Let us look at some of the issues we will bring to the debate today for the other members as they progress through. There are failures in crime, health, housing and cost of living. We think those things are vitally important. It astounds and disturbs me that members opposite would think otherwise. When we reflect on those failures, we are told that we are not being positive about the state, or we are mistaken, or we do not understand. The women’s and babies’ hospital decision-making seems to be shrouded in secrecy. There was a process that led to the development of a plan. There was then a backflip with very little explanation. When the member for Vasse has tried to get to the bottom of that, we have seen deflection. We have had no clear answers and very little information has been provided. The situation is the same with the Osborne Park Hospital baby ward that the member asked about today. We saw the uncomfortable responses from the government around that. It has been found to have had a program of developing an asset that was not being utilised and is now trying to claim that it is somehow normal for the health system to build things in places where they are not needed, in case they are needed. In other areas of the state, hospitals are desperately needed that are not being built and not being attended to. Health services throughout the state need a boost. Some regional hospitals in particular are in a desperate situation and are awaiting redevelopment and for their infrastructure needs to be addressed.

The Minister for Health announced last week that she would implement electronic medical records in hospitals—something groups such as the Australian Medical Association have called for for years. An announcement was made about that in last year’s budget, but we have seen no progress on that issue. That is the problem. Matters are announced and put in the budget, but there is no commitment to time lines. There is no commitment to when any

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of these things will be delivered. When commitments are given, they are included in a press statement, but rarely do we see them met.

I turn to youth justice. Once again, the situation at Banksia Hill Detention Centre has erupted. That has been going on for months and months. For years we have seen a lack of action to the crisis that has unfolded at Banksia Hill. Last night that situation blew up and riots occurred. No doubt the minister has been there to look at the situation. However, we understand there has been chronic understaffing and a failure to deliver the improvements that were promised in that facility. Looking more broadly, the promised improvements to the Kimberley and the provision of an on-country residential facility seem to have stalled. Again, there has been a complete lack of ability to meet the time lines that the government has said it would.

No doubt the member for Roe will highlight some educational issues when talking about other areas of government expenditure. Esperance Senior High School is one of the top performing high schools in the state. Despite the member's advocacy on this matter and repeated calls for funding, that school is a crumbling facility that is not up to standard and that has not been addressed by this government.

Yesterday we had a matter of public interest on housing. The Minister for Housing is again here now. We went through a number of issues in housing. For instance, at the end of January, 1 857 public housing properties were vacant, of which 1 452 were considered to be undergoing maintenance, repairs or refurbishments. There is an increasing waitlist for social housing. Government announcements were made recently about that, but, again, no time lines were given in those announcements. A very large amount of money has been announced, but no time line given for the delivery of those. I put it to the government that it would be much more believable if it were to at least give people an idea of when those houses would start to be available and when the program would be completed, so there could be some certainty. It could also release a map of where it would be putting the houses and where the land is that it needs to meet that target. We could have some confidence in such a program, but what we see is a program that is devoid of any real information and is just a promise—a promise that we do not expect will be delivered on time. We had that debate yesterday, so I will leave that there for now.

In the Kimberley an issue with crime has led to the Kimberley Regional Group, an alliance of four shires—Broome, Derby—West Kimberley, Halls Creek and Wyndham—East Kimberley. In its February 2022 communiqué it reported that it had a series of meetings with state government ministers and officials about the Kimberley and strategies to address family dysfunction and overcrowded housing, alcohol abuse and low school attendance rates experienced across the Kimberley. Time and again those advocates have called for the wraparound support services that would address the problems those communities face. There are issues in the Kimberley that are not being addressed. The funding for the Kimberley on-country residential facility was finally allocated in May 2022. The minister said in answer to questions that the government hoped to have the facility up and running in early 2023, but we still have no such facility. The crisis care centre that was to be built at Banksia Hill as part of the \$25 million investment has not been built. The promised new Aboriginal services unit has also not been fully delivered. The Target 120 extension to four locations in the Kimberley was announced at the same time as the funding for the on-country residential facility in May 2022; however, Halls Creek is still not up and running. Family and domestic violence programs in the area are also not being delivered as we know they should be in that area.

There have been huge problems in retaining police numbers. Promises have been made about having a fully staffed police force, but we see experienced police leaving and new recruits coming in. We know that that is putting pressure on the service. We all want to see our police properly rewarded. We want to see them in a job in which they feel valued. I must ask: Why are the police leaving the service at such a level? What is the government doing to try to get to the bottom of the issue? Is there some sort of problem with their conditions? Is it their remuneration? Is it that they do not feel valued within the service? Perhaps if the Minister for Police were here, we could get an understanding from the government. Maybe one of the other ministers may be able to offer some advice on what is done to interview those officers when they leave, to get an understanding of what they are experiencing and why they are moving on. Maybe then we could start to compile a program that would retain officers in the police force rather than losing them. We just saw a significant breakdown between the police and prosecutors in the situation of the person who had been charged for corruption offences in connection with the Paul Whyte affair. Some of the reports referred to the fact that many police had been moved through the process, which gives us an understanding of what is going on in the force. Shortages of staff and pressures on people might be contributing to that. In fact, it could well be that a lack of support has led to some of those situations. I do not know, but these are the situations that can arise with staffing shortages, and, no doubt, we will hear more about that as time goes on.

We know that all Western Australian families and many Western Australian households, whether they are families or singles, are having trouble dealing with the increasing cost of living, which is hitting Western Australians very hard indeed. Ahead of the state budget, Anglicare recently released new figures for April showing a yearly increase in the number of people seeking help to pay their bills and feed their families. During April, Anglicare received 2 250 calls for help, which is a 38 per cent increase on the same time last year. More than 1 000 people were supported

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with food relief and financial assistance to help pay for their transport, medical costs, utilities and rent. Mr Glasson of Anglicare said —

“This data confirms the rising rate of financial stress being experienced by WA families—and the widening gap between those who have the income to make ends meet—and those who don’t ...

“Put simply, the benefits of our strong economy have not been shared equally.

We know that this budget is an opportunity for the government to make some announcements. We know that there is a need to address many failings in housing, health and people’s ability to make ends meet. We would like the government to bring out a budget that addresses those issues and makes a meaningful commitment to carrying out the programs it has introduced.

I will conclude on that, and I will allow some of the other members of the opposition to make a contribution because I am sure that they all have examples in their areas that they would like to discuss.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [4.22 pm]: I rise to support this motion —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

It could be argued, and I would argue, that no area is more in need of focus or honesty when it comes to tomorrow’s budget than public health. For our health sector, business as usual just will not cut it with Western Australians in tomorrow’s budget. There has been too much deceit, too much obfuscation, too many broken promises and, unfortunately and quite distressingly, too many tragedies. While this government has been busy talking up what an amazing economic manager it is—never mind that economists tell us that our surplus is much more about good luck than good management—health outcomes in Western Australia have declined. We have seen health outcomes decline while the McGowan Labor government’s economic position continues to improve. This raises many questions from the public about how this is so. We see patients stuck in ambulances in hospital driveways; women in labour being shunted between overburdened maternity wards; and children waiting over a year to see specialists, with their wait times blowing out. Our emergency departments are some of the worst performing in the nation. Elective and critical surgery waitlists are blowing out and, tragically, people are dying waiting for surgery. We have multimillion-dollar facilities lying dormant. I asked a question about that in Parliament today and again received an unsatisfactory answer from the Minister for Health. Women with breast lumps are enduring agonising waits for diagnoses. Too many people are dying unnecessarily.

I give credit where credit is due though. Although I stand here today to chronicle some of the government’s litany of failures in our health sector, I congratulate the Premier and his team on the rolled-gold state of their spin machine. Any government in the world would be envious of a government that can announce infrastructure and initiatives over and over but actually deliver nothing.

Let us look at the Karratha step-up, step-down mental health facility as an example. Since first being elected in 2017, the McGowan government has issued 13 media statements promising this centre. That has not been 13 mentions in interviews or at doorstops; it has been 13 promises in official media statements—on letterhead, complete with pictures of beaming and young-looking cabinet ministers, and distributed through authorised channels by the Premier’s slick spin machine. Time is short, so I will chronicle just a couple of the announcements for a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha: on 7 September 2017, \$12.3 million; on 2 November 2018, a share of \$28 million; on 11 January 2019, a share of \$21 million. The last mention was on 2 May 2022, just about a year ago, when an additional \$1.6 million was pledged for a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha. I will cut to the chase: is there a step-up, step-down facility in Karratha? Has a sod even been turned on this mental health facility? The answer is no. Some might suggest this is an isolated incident, but it is not. We know that the government is very good at building car parks, but it seems that that is about it.

Let us look at the Broome step-up, step-down facility. It has had another 13 slick media statements, but there is still no facility. I do not have time to start on the 2017 election promise that was medi-hotels, but I have flagged this before in this place. In six years, only one of three medi-hotels has been delivered, and that is probably because it only has four beds.

I will now touch on the women’s and babies’ hospital and the farce around that.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** It was fully funded.

**Ms L. METTAM:** It is sitting in a special purpose account.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** But it is fully funded.

**Ms L. METTAM:** You are not delivering anything. You are great at announcements but so poor when it comes to —

**Ms S.E. Winton:** It is paid for. We are not having to borrow more money to pay for it.

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**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** Minister!

**Ms L. METTAM:** The government is so poor when it comes to delivery, particularly in the portfolio that the minister represents. Funding sitting in an account is a far stretch from actually delivering on an election commitment. We are a long way away from that. Over the last four years, we have seen slick media statement after slick media statement announcing King Edward Memorial Hospital will close and the new women's and babies' hospital will be built alongside the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre. As I have stated in this place, about six weeks ago the minister also commented on how the women's and babies' hospital would be alongside or at the QEII site. This is on the back of three decades of advice saying that QEII was the right site for the hospital. The government told us that planning was underway, consultation had happened and more than \$1 billion had been allocated to make it happen. It was only in February this year that the minister was telling us, as I have said, how proud she was that Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre had been chosen as the site for the new women's and babies' hospital, because it would be in close proximity to Perth Children's Hospital, and that would enable easy access by women whose babies needed special care. We now fast-forward to 11 April this year, when the spin machine rolled out and the Premier, along with the Minister for Health, told us that the new women's and babies' hospital would be built in Murdoch, because that would be best for the women and children of Western Australia and for health workers, and apparently also for the budget bottom line. We could not make this up. There was no consultation, no review and no debate. The decision had been made.

The Australian Medical Association has stated that it has never seen health decisions made in this way. Health expert after health expert has come out and slammed this decision. However, clearly neither the Premier nor the Minister for Health has been listening, because apparently they know best. Helping Little Hands, a Perth-based parent-led charity that provides services and advocacy for families with premature and sick babies, has said, and I quote from my notes —

Services and facilities for premature and sick babies must be co-located—the new King Eddies must be built near PCH. Co-location is a global gold standard because you cannot transport tiny critically sick babies without risking bad health outcomes. Without co-location, death and life-long disability rates of our most vulnerable babies will increase.

Karen Simmer, the former head of the King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women neonatal unit, has also slammed the decision. She reluctantly came out and did some media on behalf of clinicians who are unable to speak out because they are currently working within WA Health. She has called the decision dangerous. She has also said much about the fact that we will be moving away from a gold standard in the delivery of care for mums and their newborn babies. There are fears that recovering mothers will be separated from their newborns if those babies require specialist care at Perth Children's Hospital. All the health organisations had been readying themselves for the new women's and babies' hospital to be located at the site of Perth Children's Hospital. This decision has clearly changed the goalposts. The government is persisting with this decision in the face of criticism from leaders in clinical care who have raised serious potential outcomes for the care of our most vulnerable. The government has done nothing during the past six years. It is now in catch-up mode and is clearly making decisions on the hop.

The reason that the new women's and babies' hospital will be located at Murdoch is apparently related to congestion issues and disruption. It is clearly a decision that does not warrant proper consultation with the clinical experts in the field. I look forward to seeing the business case on this significant U-turn that has taken place in the last six weeks and what the new evidence is. When specialists in this field are raising grave concerns about the potential clinical outcomes of this decision, it raises a question about the worthiness of this decision and the need for this government to provide clarity about it.

There is a pattern here that explains why our health system is teetering on the brink of collapse and is failing not only patients, but also our dedicated health workers. Let us look at the failings. The first is ambulance ramping. It is almost impossible to count the number of times the now former shadow Minister for Health, Roger Cook, talked in the media about the health crisis that he believed existed under the Barnett government. The McGowan government finished last year with the highest ambulance ramping hours on record, over 66 000 hours, or almost seven times greater than the worst figures under the former Barnett government. I would love to know what the former health minister would call 66 000 hours of ambulance ramping when he called 1 030 hours, or the equivalent of almost 10 000 hours a year, a crisis.

The second failure is our underperforming, under-resourced and understaffed emergency departments. Last month, the Australian Medical Association's *Public hospital report card* found that even when Western Australia was relatively COVID free and hospitals in other states were groaning under the weight of COVID admissions, Western Australian hospitals were among the worst performing in the nation. I did enjoy that when I said that Western Australia had seven of the 10 worst performing emergency departments in Australia, the Minister for Health corrected me to say that seven of the eight worst performing EDs are here in Western Australia. This is despite the government being able to artificially lower the wait times in emergency departments by keeping people in

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ambulances and in hospital driveways, and once those patients finally get to the emergency department, only one in three of those who need urgent care are seen within the recommended 30 minutes. Who does the government blame when it comes to ambulance ramping and these challenges? The government first blamed St John Ambulance, although the pressure has eased off that organisation recently. The government has now turned its attention to our elderly. We are told that they are taking up too many hospital beds and clogging the system. Telling the elderly to refrain from calling an ambulance, and paying nursing homes to take them out of hospital regardless of whether they want to go, certainly raises a number of questions in the health sector. The McGowan government has been asleep at the wheel for the past six years. It has failed to address the core problems of capacity and resourcing in our hospital system.

No debate on the failures of our emergency departments during this term of government could be complete without paying tribute to the memory of Aishwarya Aswath, and to her parents, who had to fight with tooth and nail determination to highlight the understaffing, under-resourcing and inadequate protocols in our hospital system. That is why, very admirably, their campaign has expanded beyond Perth Children's Hospital and they are now seeking an investigation into the running of all our emergency departments.

When it comes to surgery waitlists, this is grist for the mill for the McGowan government's spin team. It is certainly quick to tell members that in March 2022, there were 30 558 cases on the elective surgery waitlist, and by March 2023 that had been reduced to 26 910 cases.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms L. METTAM:** There had been a drop in the numbers on the waitlist, but what the government does not spruik about is that of the 30 000 cases on the waitlist, 83 per cent or 25 000 were seen within the recommended time, leaving 4 952 over boundary. Of the 26 910 cases on the waitlist for March 2023, 77.2 per cent were seen within the recommended time, leaving over 6 140 over boundary. We have seen a 25 per cent increase in the number of patients not being seen within the recommended time frame, while the waitlist is apparently getting smaller. Issues with the hidden waitlist are often talked about by the Australian Medical Association, which is the time it takes to actually get an appointment. We see that a greater number of people are not receiving their treatment within the clinically recommended time frame. The system is not performing as it was, even just a year ago.

Wait times at the ninetieth percentile have also increased for category 2 and 3 patients. For category 2 patients the wait time in March 2022 was 161 days; in March 2023, it was 224 days. For category 3 patients, the wait time in March 2022 was 381 days; in March 2023, it was 494 days. As of June last year, more than 1 000 children were waiting too long for their surgery at Perth Children's Hospital—300 more cases than in the previous year. The worst bottleneck was at the children's hospital for ear, nose and throat surgery, with a median wait time of 369 days. It is a similar story for patients needing ENT surgery at Fiona Stanley Hospital, with a wait time of 200 days; at Joondalup Health Campus, with a wait time of 207 days; at St John of God Midland Public Hospital, with a wait time of 235 days and at Peel Health Campus, with a wait of 237 days. Our children cannot wait a year to get their appointment and hear properly. It will be a pile on of bad news for this government if children have speech problems as a result of not being able to hear properly. The current median wait time to access a paediatrician and a speech pathologist through the metropolitan Child Development Service is 17.8 months—nearly 18 months—up from just over a year in February 2022. Our children deserve better.

Let us look at mental health care in WA. I have already touched on and outlined the sad case of the step-up, step-down facilities in Broome and Karratha. Graylands Hospital is another example of the government knowing better than the health experts. Despite a decade of advice from mental health experts regarding the closure of Graylands, the government announced it would commit \$218 million to repurpose and extend the life of that facility. What happened between now and 2019 when the government committed \$3 million to fund comprehensive planning to decommission the hospital? I can tell the house—probably not that much. All this being said, I certainly hope that we actually start to see some things improve in the health sector going forward.

The Treasurer has already shown his hand on health spending in the upcoming budget. Again, the spin machine went into overdrive last week, announcing a \$1.2 billion investment in health infrastructure. If we dissect that, it turns out that it consisted largely of already announced projects together with normal asset replacement. If we take out last year's allocated budget funding of \$473 million for health capital works for 2023–24, the \$129 million already announced in the midyear review and the \$218 million for Graylands, we are left with \$400 million over four years.

We look forward to what the budget will reveal tomorrow across a range of areas. I have touched on the health portfolio, but there is plenty more to say about it. I know that others will speak on other portfolios as well. There is certainly a mismatch and gap between the strong surplus the government enjoys as a result of the great windfalls to the state from the \$40 billion-plus in royalties over the last five years and the GST fix, and what we are seeing on

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the ground when speaking to patients and health workers who are working every day whilst dealing with a hospital system under extraordinary pressure.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [4.45 pm]: I certainly appreciate the opportunity today to speak on this motion from the Leader of the Opposition that this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

As the member for Vasse said, we are looking forward to the budget to see some of the solutions offered. As she said, we have got a government that is big on announcements but very small on delivery. This afternoon I would like to talk a little about housing. I know that we had a matter of public interest on housing yesterday, but from my perspective, it is a real issue in our regional areas. Every member of the opposition has been trying to shine a light on what is happening in housing and some of the issues that are affecting their constituents.

The other thing that I would like to mention is the fantastic job done by the Auditor General in Western Australia. This is the one person who is actually shining a light on the deficiencies of this government without fear or favour. She is going from one thing to another and shining a light on deficiencies, such as the way the Attorney General is handling the Public Trustee or the situation with the rapid antigen tests. Seriously, an enormous amount of money has been spent on RATs—\$580-odd million. As the member for Moore said yesterday, the Geraldton Health Campus and Bunbury Hospital at South West Health Campus could have been fixed five times over with what this government has spent on RATs. All we have got in Geraldton after six years of this government is the car park. It is not good enough. We saw two departments competing to try to purchase RATs. We ended up with a \$581 million bill. As the member for Moore said, most of the RATs will end up on the rubbish tip. From my perspective, I want to congratulate the Auditor General on the excellent job that she is doing in holding the government to account and highlighting some of these deficiencies.

Of course, anything to do with Metronet gets the green light. The Premier says, “Just get it done. Don’t worry about how much it costs”. We have seen that blowout from \$3 billion up to \$10 billion and more. The ironic thing about this is that there are developers trying to develop land around the Metronet railway stations. We have heard the Minister for Transport talk about using these hubs time after time. At the same time, today we had the Minister for Energy apologising and explaining why it will take 12 or 15 months to hook up to Western Power. I can only imagine the frustration of the developers out there, trying to get people connected. They get on the home straight, and then Western Power cannot get the job done. The minister spoke today about some of these people being the same, they have not been able to get people to work for them, and so on. Someone in my electorate was trying to start a business dispensing agricultural products out to farmers. They had built the shed, got all the product in there, and what did they get from Western Power? A standard letter, time after time. It took intervention and, eventually, we actually have it connected or well on the way to being connected for this particular season, but it is nearly too late. This is an example of people building things and not being able to get connected to Western Power. That is a real breakdown, and the government needs to address that with the housing scenario in mind, as well.

Last year, the Minister for Housing announced a statewide builders panel to deliver more social housing, and 85 building companies were appointed to the panel. I am wondering whether that panel has delivered on the remit that it was asked to achieve. In March, the Housing First Homelessness Advisory Group was appointed to support the implementation of *All paths lead to a home: Western Australia’s 10-year strategy on homelessness 2020–2030*. I am concerned that that is another strategy by Labor to promise but not deliver. Do those two agencies work together or are they taking a silo approach to this issue? They need to think and act a lot quicker to ensure that Western Australians are given the best chance possible to live safely and prosper in one of the richest states in the world.

We have a scenario in which there is no stock. Certainly, in my electorate of Roe, we have very little stock left. A constituent rang my office in the last couple of days. She is in no-man’s-land. She has a disabled son who is five years old and four other children under the age of six. She also cares for three more children who are at risk. She is seeking a house to cater for the children but is not able to find anywhere in social housing. The Housing Authority could not accommodate them as it has no houses that could cater for her disabled son, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme can offer only limited support as the disabled child is not yet six years of age. That is the sort of situation some of our constituents are in. I have written to the minister asking for assistance for this family, but this is a single mother who is caring for eight children with one in a wheelchair who is seeking emergency accommodation, and we have no options left. That is the situation in which I am questioning the government’s ability to deliver.

I am also questioning the Bullsbrook facility, which was built during the COVID pandemic, of course, which appears to me to still be empty. I am curious and would like someone to enlighten me on how that is going. I know we have a massive bill each year—I think it is in the order of \$13 million—to maintain that facility. Is that an opportunity?

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I refer to a recent Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre report that highlights the issues that we are all familiar with. Some of these were quoted yesterday. Obviously, the interest rate rises, cost of housing and rent increases have made housing less affordable. House rents have risen by 13 per cent over the last year, while unit rents have increased by 13.6 per cent. The report states that new supply will be well below the average for the next two to three years. It states that around 900 social housing dwellings per annum need to be provided just to maintain social housing at its current level as a proportion of total stock. The same report highlights rental affordability deterioration across WA. Over five years, rents have risen by 50 per cent in Broome, 82 per cent in Karratha and 93 per cent in Port Hedland, and greater Perth has seen rents rise by between 28 per cent and 43 per cent in places such as Melville. We have a real problem here. It is a combination of many things, but it is something I am looking forward to seeing the government address in this state budget.

On the radio yesterday morning, a commentator reported on the appearance of tents alongside the road on his morning commute to work. He said that for the richest state in the nation, and apparently the luckiest in the world, this is simply a disgrace. Minister Carey stated on the record earlier this year, in a media statement released on 1 May —

... the McGowan Government's record investment in social housing and homelessness measures, we've added more than 1,200 social homes, with nearly 1,000 social homes currently under contract or construction.

Census data shows that 24 per cent of homeless Western Australians are sleeping rough. That is by far the highest proportion of any state in Australia. At the end of February, the public housing waiting list was 18 963 applications representing 33 884 Western Australians. That is a real concern.

I want to talk about international students and international education, which is in my portfolio. We know that the Premier had his recent well-publicised trip to China, looking at generous incentives for international students to come to WA. We are seeing from the media reports that many of these international students are couch surfing. They are paying thousands in advance to secure a rental and offering much larger rents to secure accommodation. We hear stories of universities that are imploring their staff to take in international students, but it seems a contradictory scenario. We are over there, trying to attract those international students, and let us just hope for the best for somewhere to house them. We saw the story of the young lady from overseas. She was here a couple of years ago; she came back and could not believe the difference. She was caught out and had to go to a youth hostel for a couple of days and try to find somewhere else for another couple of days. She used to share with two or three students. There are many people like her in that same boat. Firstly, they cannot afford accommodation; secondly, there is nowhere to rent. Some of them are paying tuition fees of between \$6 000 and \$28 000 per semester. I think we need to be careful about trying to attract all these students here if they actually have nowhere to live.

I have spoken many a time about regional housing. As I said, in the electorate of Roe, we just do not have any available housing. In fact, we have 15 houses for rent in my whole electorate, which spans 105 000 square kilometres. It goes from Williams–Narrogin right through to Esperance, and we have a grand total of 15 houses. What is happening, of course, is a scenario whereby some of our companies are actually also taking up quite a bit of that stock. In my town of Katanning, we have WAMMCO International, Ausgold and Enel Green Power, which is building the wind farm. They have taken up all this stock. We need some thought about how we can improve the scenario.

The member for Central Wheatbelt has talked many a time about the headworks fund and making more land available to develop housing in our regional towns. Once again, the government announced something a while ago, but it certainly is not having any impact at this stage.

Government Regional Officers' Housing is probably the issue that really worries me above all. We cannot expect our young health professionals, teachers or police to turn up in regional areas if there is no suitable housing for them. That is quite a concern. At the minister's suggestion I have been noting each particular example, because the minister keeps saying to me, "If there's an issue or an example, come and talk to me." That is what I will be doing because we have scenarios with GROH housing and a situation in one of our towns in the great southern in which the shire actually wants to build housing for WA Country Health Service nurses. Land is being held by the Department of Communities and the Department of Housing; there is land available, but it is being withheld when there is a shire council that actually wants to build housing. That is not good enough. I have brought these examples up with the Minister for Housing. He is requesting this, so I will be bringing them up with him again, and I look forward to his responses.

I am looking forward to a couple of other things in the budget. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, the government has talked about building new schools. The government made an announcement last week about Rockingham Senior High School and Safety Bay Senior High School. Both were built in the 1970s and it is no doubt necessary to build new campuses, but Esperance Senior High School was built in the 1960s and people in our community have been advocating for upgrades for more than 20 years—and very strongly so over the last couple of years. I am involved with that community advocacy group. We saw the Premier and the Minister for Education



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turn up in Rockingham and Safety Bay last week, the week before the budget, to announce investment of \$100 million in those two schools. Members can imagine what the Esperance community is saying about that on social media. They are hopeful that there will be something for them in tomorrow's budget, but I am not going to hold my breath. There are approximately 1 000 students at Esperance Senior High School but the campus has several issues, including concrete cancer, issues with stairwells and issues with classrooms.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Kids actually do not want to go to the toilet there during the day because the facilities are not up to scratch. I certainly would not run down any investment in the high schools in Safety Bay or Rockingham—funnily enough, the Premier's electorate—but it is time that the whole state was treated equally. We have a school in Esperance that was built nearly a decade before the schools in Rockingham and Safety Bay, so members will understand why the people of Esperance are asking, "Where do we come into this?" The infrastructure division of the Department of Education told us that it needed to do a statewide audit to see how these facilities fit in with the statewide situation, but then we saw the Premier and the Minister for Education in Rockingham and Safety Bay last week making that announcement. I look forward to hearing the Premier announce something for Esperance Senior High School in tomorrow's budget, but I will not hold my breath, that is for sure.

On the subject of education, we have some real issues. A lot of our teachers have said, "I've had enough." They have not been looked after by this government over the last six years. They have had to go to war every time they have asked for a pay rise, and that is happening throughout the public sector. A lot of teachers have now got to the point at which they are saying, "I've had enough. I'm out. It's not worth it." That is putting pressure on the whole sector and we had to bring education trainees in last year to supplement the teaching situation. I think there was something in the order of 672 trainees last year. That is putting pressure on the system.

I also want to mention the revolving door of leadership in some of our schools. I have spoken about this many times. There are situations in which there have been six or seven different principals at a school over a three or four-year period, while there is a substantive principal who held the role six years ago but has gone off to perhaps another couple of schools, but they still hold that substantive role. I have spoken to the Minister for Education and the director general about this. It is something that needs to be addressed. It is probably not necessarily a budget issue, but there is a revolving door of leadership in our metropolitan and country schools, and that is a real issue.

We have a shortage of police, nurses and teachers. I look forward to further measures in the state budget to deal with some of those issues. As I said, I very much look forward to an announcement on Esperance Senior High School, which is of the same vintage as the high schools in Rockingham and Safety Bay, but I will not hold my breath. I will be watching very closely tomorrow. I am pleased to see the Minister for Education wandering in as I talk about looking forward to Esperance Senior High School receiving some funding in tomorrow's budget, similar to that of the Rockingham and Safety Bay Senior High Schools. I will be sitting here at two o'clock tomorrow watching closely to see the results in the state budget for my regional constituents and Esperance constituents.

**MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training)** [5.07 pm]: I want to address some of the issues raised by the opposition. I first of all point out to the house how broad this motion is. It states —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

Now members opposite make absolutely no bones about keeping their resolutions very, very broad, because that has been the nature of their contributions across the board, whether in private members' business, suspensions of standing orders or matters of public interest. They have ranged far and wide in their contributions, and there is absolutely no discipline or focus. I have made the point before that, to my mind, that speaks to what members opposite are like as an opposition and what they would be like in government—ill-focused and ranging far and wide over a number of different topics but offering no solutions to the issues confronting Western Australia as a modern community and economy. Members opposite have made no bones about that this time; they have made their resolution incredibly broad.

Despite that, I was a bit surprised when the Leader of the Opposition sat down after a contribution of about 22 minutes. It was a very, very light touch from the Leader of the Opposition. Notwithstanding the broad scope of what the opposition has described as the many government failures impacting upon WA families and households, the Leader of the Opposition spoke for only about 22 or 23 minutes. It was a very woeful contribution from the Leader of the Opposition and one that he should be ashamed of. I had to smile when his deputy, Peter Rundle, talked about one person shining a light on the government—that being the Auditor General. I am not sure what that says about members of the opposition. That was a little embarrassing. It seems to me that the member for Roe walked into it.

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I will talk about the achievements of the McGowan government, because there is a lot to talk about. That is not to say that we are insensitive to or unaware of the challenges that face Western Australians who might be struggling. We live in a modern economy that does well at times, but at other times there are downturns. There are times when the economy is going well, but the other side of the coin is that there can be inflationary pressures and pressures to have enough labour to do the work that is available. There are inflationary pressures that affect housing and the cost of food and services. Other jurisdictions in Australia and modern economies across the world are facing these challenges and trying to get the balance right.

On balance, under the leadership of the Premier, we have a state government that is managing all those challenges as well as could possibly be expected, and, in fact, better than that. We are performing well in the face of a number of global challenges, global headwinds and, at times, national challenges. I want to talk about some of the achievements, because I think our government should be pleased about them. As I said, that is not because we are insensitive to the challenges that are facing Western Australians, but we are doing our best to come up with and implement practical solutions to address those challenges. That is in sharp contrast to the opposition, which is quick to point out failures, but is not especially focused or systematic in pointing out those failures, and very short on solutions. The practical policies and initiatives that members opposite would put in place to resolve the pressures that are facing the state are very thin on the ground.

Let us look at what the McGowan government has achieved since coming to office. I want to focus particularly on the number of Western Australians in work. This is not a cliché. It is absolutely true that the best we can do for Western Australians is to provide work for them—to provide them with well-paid and secure jobs around the state. We need to get people who are facing hardship, those who have struggled to participate in the labour market, young people who are struggling at school and are having difficulty getting into the workforce, the long-term unemployed, older workers, women who are trying to re-enter the workforce and people with disabilities into training or into the workforce. The best thing the government can do is facilitate those people getting into work to give them their own income and to give them a relationship with an employer that they can hopefully keep to give them experience in the workforce. At the moment, we have a record 1.53 million Western Australians in work, the highest ever number of people in full-time work in this state, with over 218 000 jobs being created since Labor came to office in 2017. I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that has achieved that. That is no mean feat. We are not only making sure that people are in jobs, but also focusing our programs and effort on those people who need some extra assistance, and I will talk about that a bit more in a moment.

We have reduced debt by one-third to \$29.2 billion. That is absolutely remarkable. These are not theoretical figures; these are practical figures, which means that our credit rating stays high and any interest that we pay on debt is low, and it gives us the capacity to invest further in our state. In 2021–22 alone, debt reduced by \$4.3 billion, the largest decline in debt on record. We just have to compare that with what is happening in other states. In New South Wales alone, debt will more than triple to \$133.7 billion by 2024–25. The last coalition government left that state in debt. This sort of economic performance by our state is a remarkable achievement, and I know that the Premier and Treasurer is proud to be paying down debt at the same time, as he should be.

I talked about the savings in debt. By paying down the debt that was accrued under the coalition government, Western Australians have been saved more than \$2.5 billion in interest costs in our first four years alone. That is a massive saving. It means that we have been able to put money aside to pay for the women's and children's hospital. We have put \$2 billion aside to pay for the next desalination plant. We are able to invest in a number of infrastructure projects and also targeted programs that members will hear more about in tomorrow's budget.

Finally on our achievements, I was looking at some of the commentary. In February this year, S&P Global Ratings released its half-yearly report and said that Western Australia's budgetary performance is superior to that of most domestic and global peers and that Western Australia's debt-to-revenue ratio should decline over the next few years in stark contrast to the rising debt of many peers. In March this year, the chief economist with our friends at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, Aaron Morey, is reported to have said —

“The world economy teeters on a knife edge ...

“Western Australia is one of the most trade-exposed economies in the world—its businesses cannot hide from these global factors.

“Against this backdrop, Western Australia's economic fundamentals remain as solid as ever.

“Our domestic economy is now 12 per cent bigger than it was pre-COVID and the number of West Australians in full-time work continues to grow.

I think members would agree that they are very solid bouquets from organisations that are not usually inclined to give Labor governments bouquets.

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On the broad economic metrics, they are some fantastic outcomes and that means that we are able to deliver in targeted areas, whether it is in infrastructure spend, education, health, community services or supporting vulnerable Western Australians. We will hear more about that in government members' contributions today, but also in the state budget tomorrow.

Yesterday in the debate, the Leader of the Liberal Party made the comment that there had been a 17 per cent reduction in vocational training over the first three years of the McGowan government. It was a bit of a throwaway line, but it piqued my interest because I was not aware that that was the case. She was making reference to changes in the skilled migration program that took place when we first came to office. I want to repeat her claim: there had been a 17 per cent reduction in training over the first three years of the McGowan government. In the last week of sitting, we had a debate about challenging these lofty claims by the opposition. We said that there needs to be a bit of stress testing of some of its claims because they do not always stack up. If the Leader of the Liberal Party is listening somewhere—she is not in the chamber right now—I am interested in exactly where she got that figure from.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** Shall we mention how many of your members aren't in the chamber?

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** I am just making the point that she is not here, but I am putting it out there.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** It is unparliamentary and it is not convention, minister, and you know it.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** There is a reasonable number of our members in the chamber. The Leader of the Liberal Party made a claim, but I do not know where she got that figure from. I cannot see it in any published data from the Department of Training and Workforce Development. In fact, my information is that despite woeful vocational training figures under the previous government, largely driven by massive increases in the fees for vocational training, VET student numbers actually increased by two per cent, from 90 500 in 2017 to 92 500 in 2020. Under the previous Liberal government, the number of publicly funded VET students decreased by a staggering 22 per cent from 2013 to 2017. As I said before, 22 per cent is a massive decline, and it was largely driven by huge fee increases implemented under the previous government. In sharp contrast, we have had a massive program of, first of all, freezing TAFE fees and, then, subsidising or reducing TAFE or vocational training fees. The best example of that is the fee-free courses. In 2023, there are 130 free courses. They are either full courses or skill sets. It is a fantastic outcome. In fact, student numbers have continued to grow, with the number of publicly funded VET students increasing by almost 14 per cent from 2017 to the end of last year. We are very proud of that record.

I want to give some examples of what a constructive and targeted approach to fee relief means to people taking up training. We have slashed TAFE fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses in priority industries. I know that these headline figures do not mean that much, but their impact was recently brought home to me when I looked at the course fees for building surveyors. The Western Australian Local Government Association came to see me and said, "We have a dearth of building surveyors and we need people to undertake that training and then come and work for us, because the knock-on effect is that it is holding up approvals, and we really need to address that." I was interested to know how much it would cost for a person to get an advanced diploma of building surveying. It costs \$2 400 under our Lower Fees, Local Skills program. Do members know how much that advanced diploma was under the coalition government? It was \$12 449. That is incredible. Let us look at the advanced diploma of engineering technology—electrical. Under our government, it is \$3 149. Under the previous government, it was \$11 256. How can we expect people to be motivated to do an advanced diploma of engineering technology to get the advanced skills that we need when it costs over \$11 000? Another good example is the diploma of building construction at TAFE. Under our government, that costs \$1 976. Under the previous government, it was over \$7 000 for the same course. For the three of examples I have given, the fees people will pay in 2023 are lower than they were 10 years ago, in 2013. We are incentivising people to undertake those important strategic courses by making them available with heavily discounted fees.

The state government is very proud of the fee-free courses in particular. They came about as a result of a partnership with the federal government. The federal budget delivered last night contains a commitment to more fee-free courses over the next two years, and we look forward to partnering with the federal government. It is really exciting that two-thirds of the fee-free courses for 2023 have been taken up by women, and the number one course is early childhood education and care, which is a key area of skills demand and enables women with families to get into work in not only the metro area, but also regional areas. Again, that is the sort of targeted work we are doing to address some of the concerns we are hearing from people in the regions.

My portfolio has also announced an \$11 million subsidy program for the next two years to support WA construction businesses to employ overseas skilled workers. It is not something we did lightly; we would very much prefer to train locals. We are doing that. We are undertaking training of the building and construction workforce but we need people to complete existing builds and build houses now. We are confident the program will deliver about 1 100 workers over the next couple of years so that we can get those buildings finished. We also have incentives of \$2 000 and another \$500 for equipment for construction work apprentices to finish their apprenticeship over the

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next financial year. There is a \$5.9 million incentive package for regional students who might need to leave their town to do off-the-job training, or classroom training, if you like, and for diploma of nursing students—that is, enrolled nurses—to do placements outside of their town when there are no placements for them in their town. I was in Port Hedland with the Minister for Health and the member for Pilbara to make that announcement, and it was fantastic to see the diploma of nursing students at Port Hedland TAFE. Some of them are on Teams and doing remote learning.

There is some really great equipment. The member for Pilbara and I were able to see some of the work on the \$43 million upgrade we are making to Port Hedland TAFE. There are massive upgrades in TAFE infrastructure around the state. Again, that is something I am very proud of. It began under the former Minister for Education and Training and it is going to be a game changer for so many regional TAFEs that provide vocational training opportunities. There is \$11 million for Albany, \$10 million for Kalgoorlie and, as I said, \$43 million for Port Hedland. When I was in Geraldton recently, the TAFE took delivery of three huge pieces of earthworking equipment—a bulldozer and two other big pieces of equipment—as part of a \$1 million investment in infrastructure. The three pieces of equipment will make a huge difference to civil construction training at that TAFE. We are investing in the ability for regional Western Australians to train in these very accessible and important jobs. We are also listening to what communities need and undertaking really detailed communications in regional areas. As the relatively new Minister for Training, it has been fantastic to see.

I want to speak briefly about hardship, particularly utilities. The Minister for Community Services is in the chamber, and I am sure she will address this issue as well. When I was Minister for Community Services, one of my favourite events every year was the financial counsellors dinner. I had to leave early because they really start to move it on the dance floor, and if you are not careful, you get pulled into it. It is great to see people who work around the state to not only address people's immediate need for assistance, but also give them the tools to get their head above water when it comes to their finances. I think the reform we have seen in the Water Corporation and our power utilities is another example of the government not only providing assistance, but also driving reform to change the capacity of the utilities, in this case, to properly understand what hardship means for customers and to try to address that hardship in a more constructive way. In fact, I was at the Water Authority's customer service centre in Balcatta this morning to learn about the sort of work the authority has been doing to really understand why customers are not able to pay their bills. A co-payment has been incentivised. An example is that customers will get a discount on their bill if they are able to make some contribution over one year, and if they are able to make a contribution over two years, all past debt will be cancelled.

We are not only keeping our utility increases modest and in line with inflation, but also driving reform within our utilities to get some really good outcomes. I have pointed out before the increases we saw under the previous coalition government. In the first six years of the Barnett government, water charges went up 52.8 per cent. In the first six years of the McGowan government, they have gone up 18 per cent. It is a massive difference. In terms of a mean-spirited approach to families doing it tough, the previous government restricted the water of more than 200 families a month because they were not able to pay their bills. In this financial year, just 338 restrictions have applied over the whole year. We are taking the time to get utilities to understand why people are in hardship and to have a relationship with them to try to address those issues. I am really proud of the work this government is doing.

There are many more things I could talk about. As I said at the beginning, members of the opposition have ranged far and wide in addressing this issue. Leader of the Opposition, I am not quite sure what the Landgate land sale in Midland had to do with families experiencing hardship; I could not make that connection. I noted the member for Roe's comments about the distribution of rapid antigen tests. Despite his complaints about free RATs, he was not afraid to promote them on his social media. I had a quick look and found that he was very happy to give them out, as he should be; they were publicly available and we wanted to get them out to people. The member for Roe was very happy to promote that program and did not make a peep about how the McGowan government should not have purchased those RATs. He was very happy to put his name and face to the free distribution of RATs.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [5.32 pm]: I rise to support this excellent motion from the Leader of the Opposition —

That this house calls upon the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

Of course, what the government does covers many areas. I was interested to hear the Minister for Water complain that we were ranging far and wide, but the trouble is that the failings of this government range far and wide. The government is determined to increase union membership by bringing enormous cost-saving contracts in-house, such as in the Water Corporation—two per cent year-on-year cost savings over the previous contract. I will be fascinated to find out during estimates just how much that has cost the state of Western Australia. The government buys union membership by using public money.

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**Ms S.F. McGurk:** We are giving people secure jobs.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am glad government members have become animated! The Premier of the state of Western Australia claims a degree of omnipotence. He is an expert on foreign affairs, he gives guidance to the Prime Minister and others, and he loves to lecture the other state Premiers about what they should be doing. We saw a lot of that during COVID, when he used his considerable wealth —

**Mr P. Lilburne** interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am even-handed here. During the last federal election, both leaders of the major parties were pretty keen to be seen with the Western Australian Premier and to get photos with him, but it appears that he is not able to influence his federal colleagues very much at all now. Once they had used his star power to get elected, they are quite happy to ignore —

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Certainly not on live export!

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes. There a few areas, member. Live exports are certainly very high on that list. Almost 98 per cent of the trade out of Western Australia will get hammered by the Premier's federal colleagues, despite him saying that he thinks it should be okay. The power credit being given to the rest of Australia is \$500 a household but Western Australian households will get only \$350. I will talk a little about the resource rent tax increase. We are told that some money from the \$2 billion hydrogen fund may come to Western Australia, but there will be nothing for Western Australia from the other renewables fund; that will come in the future. But the federal government is happy to apply the resource rent tax. Members might not think that it is a great deal of money, but the problem with the Premier's inability to influence his federal colleagues in these matters is that this will affect households in Western Australia as it will affect the perception of Western Australia and Australia as an increased sovereign risk. This is something that did not get too many headlines but there was a good article in *The West Australian* of 6 May that outlined that Western Australia had lost its top ranking as the world's top-rated mining investment jurisdiction, having been displaced by Nevada. I am not sure how many members have had anything to do with getting mining up in the United States, but it has not typically been the best place in the world to do it. However, the US has taken the bit between its teeth because it wants to encourage mining for the renewables revolution that is going on. WA has been displaced by Nevada due to that sovereign risk. The head of Mitsui came out and expressed severe warnings about what is happening in Australia, particularly at the federal level. The head of Chevron also expressed those difficulties. That will ultimately impact all Western Australians; that is the reality.

The reason Western Australia has been able to bankroll the rest of Australia and the reason the government has enjoyed record surpluses on top of the GST fix has been the dividend from mining. That is all it is. I will not go through this now because I will have a chance to go through it in my budget reply speech, but the arithmetic is pretty straightforward. I am fascinated to hear the boasting on the other side about the great job the government has done managing the economy. What a joke! It is due only to windfall profits that had nothing to do with the government's actions whatsoever. This government has reneged on its promise to pay down debt; that was the promise of previous Treasurer Ben Wyatt before he came into office. He promised to pay down debt but the government has reneged on that. It should have paid down debt by over \$20 billion under that promise.

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That is true. We will go through this.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** Whose debt is it?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am glad members opposite are all getting engaged.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Thank you, minister. Member for Cottesloe, I am assuming that you are taking interjections.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am glad to see members on the other side enlivened and participating.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I am just asking, because if you are giving it out, you have to take it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am glad to see that they are enlivened —

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I might say that the Minister for Water did not mind dishing it out, and uncharacteristically so I thought. Nevertheless, she was clearly invigorated to do that.

The budget covers many areas. There are straight cost-of-living areas over which the government has direct control, such as many of our critical utilities. Is the government creating a future for the state? It is all right enjoying the wealth that we have now, but is there something meaningful for the future? If we look at the future of the state—I will not go into this in great depth—we see that the government has simply failed in the area of housing. As I pointed

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out yesterday, one of the reasons Western Australians are suffering such hardship is that they cannot afford housing, whether a rental or their own home. The government's solution is to shove everyone in high-rise apartments; it thinks that is a solution to the housing problem in Perth. The problem is that the government wants to do that in my electorate so that all the millionaires' kids can have somewhere to live. Millionaires' kids have got to live somewhere, but I can tell members that that is not helping the housing crisis in their areas. Do government members remember their Metronet housing policy? What a complete and abject failure! They were going to have appropriate high-rise affordable apartments at all Metronet stations. Do they have one? No. Paul Blackburne is building some apartments in my area. In case the new Minister for Community Services is thinking that she will be able to pick up one of those apartments, I am told that a one-bedroom ground-floor apartment will cost \$800 000. The apartments at the top of each of the two towers will cost \$20 million apiece. Perhaps the government should look at that if it is seeking to provide social housing diversity. Perhaps members who are on the old parliamentary superannuation scheme could get into one of those, but I do not think many other people will be able to do that. What a farce that that will be a solution to the housing problem in Perth.

I now want to get onto the substantive debate. I first want to talk about energy. Yes, one factor is the cost of energy, but another critical factor is the reliability of energy. We are going through an energy transition. I think the public debate is well past about whether there is a driving force to do that. I am not entering that debate. However, meaningful plans need to be put in place for that. In relation to the level of investment that this state and this government will need to make, the Minister for Energy said today that most of this burden will have to be carried by the private sector. Indeed, the minister is correct. People talk about decarbonising our state electricity network—at least as it is. That network provides only 12 per cent of the total energy consumed in this state. That is not a simple task but it is relatively straightforward compared with the other 88 per cent that will have to be done by the private sector. Net Zero Australia released some information lately that said that the cost of the energy transition in Australia to go to net zero by 2060 would be between \$7 trillion and \$9 trillion. Net Zero Australia is a collaboration between the University of Melbourne, the University of Queensland and Princeton University, and Nous Group, which I understand is a well-regarded consultancy. Let us say the cost is \$8 trillion. That will mean that around \$3 trillion will need to be spent in Australia to achieve the federal government's 43 per cent carbon reduction target with renewables. The cost for Western Australia will be about a \$360 billion spend to 2030. This is a separate debate, but the level of investment that will be required is breathtaking.

The minister said today that the private sector and government will have to pick that up. None of the numbers that will be required in this state have been reported. In particular, no-one has talked about the magnitude of that task for the state. The minister has said blithely that we will need all these new power connections. For example, we will desperately need a 33-kilovolt line from Three Springs to Geraldton if the Oakajee hydrogen project is ever to take off. The minister has said that the private sector is going to pick that up. I think that is a fantasy. The state government will have to pick up the tab for a lot of that core infrastructure and perhaps try to recover that later through tariffs and other things. I will be fascinated to see what allowance will be made in the budget to allow for that future.

I will go back to one of the problems that we have seen. The report of the independent review into the Christmas outages in 2020 said that the data over a four-year period shows a materially worsening customer outage experience trend in the CBD and rural areas. There was supposed to be a plan. We still have not seen the detail of that plan. The minister has said that things are being done. I will be interested to know what future investment the government intends to make to deal with that issue. It is an enormous challenge. In this case, we are not talking about expanding the network. We are simply talking about returning the network to the condition that it was in. It is worrying, as I have mentioned before, that there has been a material deterioration in the ageing of equipment in the zero-to-five-year category. That means that during the five-year period that is mentioned in the report, which occurred almost exclusively under this government, new investment was not coming in. Therefore, the equipment was getting older, and, when equipment gets older, it is less reliable. I hope to see in the budget coming up that there are plans around that.

When we talk about the move to a renewables future in this state, the minister is talking about his own network and his plans. The minister has said that the government has detailed plans. However, we still have not seen those detailed plans. One of the things that surprised me a bit is that we have been told no worries; it is all going to go ahead; the government is on track to achieve the goals that it has set for this state and will shut down the Collie coal-fired power stations by 2029 and it will all be managed. However, the working group that is carrying out the detailed review on future energy needs has only just reported. I cannot see how the minister can have a detailed plan to deal with these problems when he has only just received the report that details the needs into the future. I think the minister was trying to imply that the government has the state side under its belt, and it is now looking at industry, which provides, let us face it, the wealth that pays our bills and supports the wellbeing and livelihood of the people of this state, to play its part. That really disturbs me.

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As I have said, this is another separate debate. Members know that I am a technical person by trade. I am a farmer by birth, so I am also a practical person. I love to get involved in the debate about the sexy bits of this transition and all the technology, because it is fascinating and interesting. However, if we do the arithmetic about the amount of money that will need to be spent and look at the capacity of the economy to fund that expense, and also to provide the engineers and procure the equipment and so on, we realise that it is an impossible task. It might be a desirable goal, but the target that has been set is impossible to achieve. I appreciate that this is coming from the government's federal colleagues, but the penalty for not achieving this goal will be a massive carbon tax, and that is going to hurt us.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** You talk about being a technical person. Did you do that technical research when you released your energy policy before the last election?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I did look at that. I will explain that, member. As the member knows, it is a matter of history. There were parts of that policy that I did not support.

Several members interjected.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I know that there are members in this chamber who do not agree with the government on this. We all talk privately. I will not repeat any private conversations in this chamber, but I can say honestly that there are policies on the other side that I know some government members opposite have severe doubts about, but they are not going to say that publicly, and the member knows that. The member has made his point.

I think that would be achievable for the electricity network on the technical side, but only with gas backup. Gas backup is critical. The challenge for the Minister for Energy in closing the coal-fired power stations is that we will need to make a major investment in the gas pipeline. That pipeline is now private, but if the government does not work with the private sector to increase the capacity of that pipeline, we will not be able to make up the energy difference. Batteries are good fun and are important in providing some control of the network, but they cannot provide standard backup. I also do not believe that pumped hydro will ever be viable, particularly in the proposal that was made for Collie.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** Are you working on a new energy policy for 2025?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am sure that the new shadow Minister for Energy will have a brand spanking new shiny policy that will delight the member.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** Will you have input?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will be working diligently with him to achieve that.

This is a ridiculous situation. The minister made an announcement on Tuesday about the \$7.3 million fund put aside to help the coalmines in Collie. I will be fascinated to see how much more money is put aside to support Griffin Coal in the coming budget.

[Member's time extended.]

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** That funding is going to be critical. What a ridiculous situation, as I said, with the government talking about budgets. It will not help people in Western Australia if the government fails to realise that the coalmine is falling over.

**Ms J.L. Hanns:** You were in the shire last week.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I was down there two weeks ago, member. I am impressed by the optimism in the community about what is being done. I am very impressed by what is being done on the main street.

**Ms J.L. Hanns:** Yes, because the McGowan government has done it.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** No, I do not say that the government does nothing. The facelift of the main street of Collie is great. There is a lot of optimism. I am happy to talk to the member for Collie–Preston privately, but the optimism around the magnesium smelter is interesting. It is a really interesting project.

**Ms J.L. Hanns:** We worked hard for that.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will talk to the member privately about that.

The probability that that will deliver on the schedule that has been promised to the community is impossible. I say that as someone who has had 24 years' experience in heavy industry and the manufacturing industry. This process manufactures a metal at a one-kilogram scale. To say that by 2029 it will deliver that as a 100 000 tonnes per annum operating refinery is fanciful. I am happy to look into that more. If the member for Collie–Preston can disabuse me of that fact, I would be delighted, but I have considerable experience in this area. We heard the Minister for Mines and Petroleum talk about his political experience today. In the heavy manufacturing industry and in developing processes into a manufacturing process, I have a lot of experience.

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**Ms S.E. Winton:** Will you go back to it soon?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I will! I am happy to go back. I like Collie. I like Professor Li's new waste-to-energy plant. I think that is good technology. Again, I am concerned about the commissioning of that. I am concerned about the support that he will get for commissioning for that process. It is a real challenge for the government.

As I said, I will be looking in the budget, because the numbers count for what the Premier, or at least the government, is going to do. If the reliance for Collie is on the smelter and it picks up those skilled manufacturing jobs in the time frame that the government has announced, I think that would be extraordinary. I will be honest: I think it is unachievable. I am happy to be disabused of that fact. No-one would be more delighted than me if that was correct. I love manufacturing and I think it is a wonderful way to give people high-quality jobs. If I am wrong, I will not be disappointed; I will be pleased. But I am genuinely concerned for the township of Collie that the time line for that project is way too optimistic. It does not reflect the reality of developing new projects. This government has enjoyed great bounties, and it is important that the money is invested in the community in the best way.

As I said, I will be interested in the energy portfolio to see what amount of money will be put into subsidising households. I do not have time to go through this, because I want other members to have a chance to make their contribution, but under this government we have seen the average debt owed to Synergy double. It has gone up by 93 per cent under this government. Despite the one-off payments that have been made, those underlying charges have been going up and up, and we have seen an almost doubling of the average debt, without any significant change in the number of disconnections. What I dislike about untargeted relief, Minister for Community Services, is that it appears that the broader part of the community is getting by, but that section who cannot pay their bills are getting further and further behind. We have the prospect and hear the Premier saying he is going to give a rebate. I assume that the state government will give everyone \$150 on top of the \$350 federal rebate. Nigel Satterley will get that state government rebate, meanwhile people who are doing it tough are not getting the support that they need. I will be looking at this budget with interest. I think the optimism around the energy transition is overly optimistic and it needs substantial government support, particularly with relief to households that need it. I will be looking to see whether there is targeted relief in the budget.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [5.54 pm]: I rise to support the motion and, clearly, I will talk from a regional perspective about many of the challenges faced by people across the state. From the outset, I would like to say something that has been flagged in this house during this debate. It is not always criticism; it is observation. We live a long way from the city and sometimes it is difficult for people to understand what might be happening on the ground. Some of what this side of the house says is actually lived experience and maybe something can be taken out of that. When I raised the issues in the north west and across my towns early on, the Minister for Police was happy to tell me there were no problems. I am glad to see that they have actually been recognised. Bear with me.

Right now, the retention of population in the regions is critical. Some of the deficits and shortfalls impact that significantly. We have been raising these issues for a long time. If we look across the region and at the retention of people in towns, we see that it is the small things that make people say, "I've had enough and I'm out", and some of those things are what people in the metropolitan area take for granted. I have lived in the metro area; it is very different. People whom we expect to attract to the regions will definitely need these incentives to travel to the regions. It is important, given that many regional areas provide a lot of income to the state. Mining, agriculture, the tourism industry and the promotion of these areas are very critical to our state and are what we need to nurture, particularly for very small businesses in regions. It is tough. As I have said before, people do not expect the world in the regions, but they expect a level of services and facilities along the way.

One thing that is really important across the state is law and order. I worked in Perth 18 months ago, on a contract. I caught the bus every day from the city. What dawned on me was that it is no different from where I come from. It is exactly the same. People are sleeping and drinking in the street, the same things are happening in the street, and children are in the street as well. I understand that this is a statewide issue. I am acutely aware of that. In the regions it is exacerbated because populations are smaller. In the city we do not see it. In the country we see it. Despite that, it is often a very small portion of the population.

It is well known that the issues associated with crime are complex. It is becoming increasingly more prevalent. When I speak to people in my family who are a lot older than me, what is going on now would never have happened in their generation, and what happened in their generation would never have happened in the generation before. We have had a significant shift or change in behaviour. Whether it is our lifestyles, expectations or education, I am unsure what that might be, but that tells me that we need to change the way we are doing things and we need to look from a different view at what is happening. Significant drugs obviously contribute. I hope that there will be something in the budget that will beef up the drug and alcohol services that we already have. Restrictions across the regions will clearly need more resources, and we will need to beef those up. I hope that will be addressed as a priority, along with mental health services, because as everyone knows, they go hand in hand.



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With the changes in law and order that have occurred in our communities and across our regions and cities, we cannot keep doing what we have done in the past. Everyone knows that it is just not working. I understand that the police are responsible for dealing with a lot of what goes on, particularly with young people, and they do an amazing, wonderful job, but it is a 24/7 job and they are not social workers. I speak to police officers on the ground all the time when they are walking the beat late at night. They are trying to be all things to all people. They do an amazing job. I think that resourcing for departments like the Department of Communities is really important and programs are really important, and I hope that more funding will come that way as well.

The previous minister advised me that the 24/7 crisis helpline is something that we need to use in the regions. I recently had to call the 24/7 crisis line, and there was no answer in our local office. I rang Geraldton and was lucky enough to get hold of someone there with whom I had a previous connection who gave me the 24/7 number. I reported the incident and asked, “Can you give me a number? If something happens over the weekend, I’d like to be able to refer to it.” That did not happen and I never heard back. That concerns me. It may be resourcing—I do not know—but I think these sorts of issues need to be looked at, because that is the only life line for someone who is outside the metro area if things go pear-shaped.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Are you talking about police?

**Ms M. BEARD:** I am talking about child protection. I have had people come in and see me, and that has been my only avenue, and the police have advised me to call them as well. We can improve on that. I understand that there is always room for improvement.

There is definitely a heightened need for these services. With the justice system the way it is, there is a complete lack of accountability and consequences for some of these offenders. People who have offended dozens of times are still offending. We saw what happened recently at the detention centre, which I think is indicative of the behaviour at the moment.

I have an article here that shows that back in October, there was a \$63 million pledge by the government, of which \$39.9 million was to deliver infrastructure upgrades to Banksia Hill Detention Centre; \$10 million was to expand mental health services, which were discussed; and \$22 million was to go towards staffing for Banksia Hill. I agree that this cannot come fast enough. We have a massive problem here. The Premier himself has advised that we have to deal with people who are behaving in an antisocial way. It is impacting everyone. It is impacting communities, towns and cities. Dr Fiona Stanley called for a whole-of-government youth strategy with cabinet oversight—I think there is merit in that—to convene a task force of Aboriginal leaders to help develop changes in the youth justice system. That is probably needed holistically across the board. I hope that there is some progress in that as well.

I refer to education for these kids and young people. Some of these kids have not been to school for a long time. We need to be creative about that. I sometimes speak with teachers on the ground in the north and they continually tell me that they are unsure; they sometimes do not feel safe; they are being held to ransom and are being threatened. There are lockdowns in schools. One teacher’s husband told me that he sometimes expects that he will have to pick his wife up from the hospital. Clearly, I spoke to him on a bad day. We really need to turn this upside down. Kalbarri lost its police and community youth centre building in the cyclone. It is desperate to get that back. Exmouth and Meekatharra do not have PCYC venues anymore. These services are really important, even for towns that are not in crisis. Meekatharra, in particular, definitely needs this service. If we have these things there all along, we will mitigate the issue rather than trying to deal with it once it has cropped up.

This growing issue that I am referring to compounds into a lot of other areas. Housing is another issue that we come up against all the time. We can attract workers, but then we do not have housing for them. I hope there will also be something in the budget to address that and to lessen that load. The workers’ accommodation in Kalbarri and Exmouth has not progressed. That is a desperate need for those communities. If they are going to grow, develop and move forward, the infrastructure is critical. Maybe we will get a nice surprise on Thursday on that as well.

I refer to crime. I make no apologies: I will continue to raise this matter for not just the regions but also the city. Many people are impacted by crime. There are lots of instances across the state of crime and antisocial behaviour that is impacting people in a negative way. I think there is a dire need for intervention and a collaborative approach across agencies and with community leaders. An example is the banned drinkers register that has been implemented. That is fabulous, but there has been a call from our side for legislative changes for many, many months to make that more flexible, more targeted and more proportionate. It is good to see that that has arrived. In many towns, these issues are caused by a minority of the population. This is going to be a step in the right direction to try to deal with the small cohort of people that cause a lot of these issues.

There are dysfunctional and disengaged people who wander the streets—as I said, even in Perth—and we need to work out how we can manage that. Safe houses are something that I have bleated on about in here for a long time. A safe house where kids can sleep and have a meal will be an essential way to turn the dial and at least get those kids to school, so I hope that funding will be made available for safe houses. I know that there are places in Perth;

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I think we need more across the regions. I do not think there are many. There is one underway in the north west. The situation is dire and we need to have safe houses as soon as we possibly can. Let us hope that pops up in the budget as well.

Today I touched on street lights. I link this to crime, as well, because street lighting is really important. I would hate to see shires start to turn their lights off if they do not have LED lighting and the cost kicks in. Lighting makes an enormous difference. I have experienced it firsthand with the lighting where I live. I know it makes a difference. It is really important for the government to pursue that aspect.

Other programs have been slow to come on. Target 120 is coming into play and has been for quite a long time. We need to also work on other strategies, as I say, like getting PCYC programs up across those towns, working together with other groups and getting safe houses into place so that we can work together. I know that some of the Aboriginal ladies whom I talk to regularly who walk the streets in different towns are saying that we need somewhere to take these kids. I have had that echoed to me from some of the police officers that I speak with as well.

Obviously, we would like to see other things. We live in the wealthiest state in Australia. We do not expect underground railways in the regions, but the hospital services and aged-care facilities are really limited. I know there are three beds in Exmouth for aged care. I spoke to a man who has three generations of his family in Exmouth. He was fortunate enough to get his wife into the hospital when she needed care. However, for most people who live in that region, there is nowhere for them to go. Their whole family might live in that region. It becomes very stressful for the families. Often what happens is those three generations leave town, and we know that creates all sorts of issues with the schools and has a knock-on effect with jobs. We need to deal with those issues.

Tom Price and Paraburdoo Hospitals are in desperate need of help. I regularly get calls from people there. I would like to see something in the budget this time for Paraburdoo Hospital.

I refer to nursing. The incentives to get nurses out into the regions are a very positive step forward. They are desperately needed. Again, on the flip side, there is a shortage of housing, so how can we encourage them to come without housing? We need to address that very quickly, and I hope that the government has some plans in place to make that change as quickly as it can.

I expect to see in the budget an increase in funding for the patient assisted travel scheme. This is really important because the cost of regional travel is now enormous. Fuel prices have increased significantly and people particularly struggle to get to metropolitan areas and are having to travel further and further for specialist appointments. There are elderly people who fly to Perth, but if the plane is delayed or cancelled, they will lose an appointment that they may have been waiting six months for. When they get to the other end, they often do not have a carer and have to get off the plane with their bags and then get to wherever they are going. The government needs to consider providing more help for these elderly people who cannot go to their own hospitals because services have been reduced. We need to find a way to get them some help when they travel, because it is becoming extremely stressful for them.

Dental health is also becoming a massive issue in the regions; there are no dentists anywhere. We have a breast cancer bus that comes through, but there are no facilities for people who are not on a card, so that becomes problematic. There is a visiting dentist in some of the hospitals, but it is a really big exercise for elderly people when they are isolated. Hopefully, mental health issues will be addressed and bundled up with drug and alcohol services. That will definitely need to be bolstered. It is critical. There are a lot of people who are currently struggling in that space, and that will only increase.

In summary, I want to acknowledge that there is a lot to do and it will not be addressed overnight. These may seem to be small issues, and the government is sometimes critical of the fact that the opposition keeps raising them in Parliament, but they are issues, they are problematic and they are causing grief in the regions. They may appear to be small issues to people who are able to go to the next suburb for their services if they cannot get the services they need, no matter what they might be. It is a struggle sometimes to even travel from the regions if the services are not available or have been cancelled.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms M. BEARD:** We also need to look at some of the issues that are impacting on small businesses. The cost of doing business in the regions is significant and bringing some equity back to the relative costs of doing business in the regions and in the metropolitan area for basic services would help significantly with job creation and allowing businesses to expand in the regions. The costs are now sometimes prohibitive for people to run small businesses in the regions. I look forward to Thursday's budget and I hope it will cover off some of the issues I have raised.

**MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt)** [6.12 pm]: I rise to support the motion that was moved by the Leader of the Opposition and I thank my colleagues for their contributions. The member for North West Central is quietly dying beside me! I would like to make a contribution about the cost of living and the challenges that many people in our communities are facing. I would like to offer some solutions to those government ministers who are sitting

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opposite. The opposition is often criticised for highlighting the challenges we see in our portfolios, our constituencies and the community more broadly, without offering solutions. Because it suits them, members opposite often make the comment that we do not offer our ideas on what we would like to see happen, so I will be specific about some of the things that I think should be in tomorrow's budget that will assist in reducing the pressures many of our Western Australian households are facing. I will rely very heavily on a very succinct document, a submission from the Western Australian Council of Social Service to the Senate Select Committee on the Cost of Living.

This has been canvassed in this place many times, so I do not think it will surprise anyone to find out what the pinch points are for families and individuals in terms of financial pressure. Whether we talk to WACOSS, St Vincent de Paul, Foodbank or any of the other support and community service industries, they will say that housing presents the most significant challenge. Although the government has made some significant announcements around that challenge, it is yet to break the back of the issue. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Roe, earlier referred to a research document from the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre. One of the first statements in that document is that the rental market is in crisis, that vacancy rates in Western Australia have been below one per cent since 2020 and that rents have risen from around \$350 per week to about \$550 per week for a house.

I listened to the member for Roe because I had read the same document. We are starting to see some houses come online, but we need to see even more activity to keep up with people exiting the rental market. The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia estimates that around 19 000 dwellings have left the rental sector in the last two years. We need to add a significantly greater number of houses to the rental market to keep up with people leaving it. Supply in the rental sector will remain constrained. Everyone in this house understands the principles of supply and demand and knows that we will see significant increases in rents for some time yet.

Rents have risen in Perth at a slightly higher rate than in the regions. The regions are not unified in that regard; there are pockets of regional Western Australia where rental prices are not as elevated as others, but rental rates in Perth have risen by 13 per cent over the last year alone. That is the greatest rise of any capital city in Australia, so we do have a real problem. This is not just the opposition standing and saying something needs to be done; it is not just WACOSS. The numbers actually demonstrate that we have a significant challenge. WACOSS in its submission identifies housing, transport, food, energy and water, mortgage repayments and rental payments as the greatest financial pressures for the community. This is where we see families trying to play one decision off against another.

Before I move off the issue of housing, and wearing my shadow Aboriginal Affairs portfolio hat, I want to very briefly talk about a presentation I went to hosted by Shelter WA. The Minister for Housing was there and it was in support of Aboriginal community housing organisations. This is an issue for which I have a solution, although not for the entire housing market—I am not going to try to solve that issue in 20 minutes on a Wednesday afternoon! There were four key Aboriginal community housing organisations, and I will go through who was there on the day. There was Shelter WA and all the key players. This was the launch of a prospectus that was developed by the sector with support from Shelter WA. It had received a COVID grant through Lotterywest to do some capacity building in these four organisations and to develop a prospectus designed to put forward to the private sector and philanthropic organisations the benefits of these Aboriginal community housing organisations, in the hope that they might partner with them to assist in delivering more of what they do.

The COVID grant allowed the development of this prospectus, and this was an event to launch the prospectus. I think it was the first official event that I went to as the shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. I had had dealings with Shelter WA. It is a very sensible peak body and it is doing a lot of work to try to support these organisations. I have since been back and had a further discussion with its staff about how it is doing more work beyond what the COVID funding allowed it to do to try to develop and support the capacity of the community housing organisations that we know exist right across the state. For this project, it was the four major housing organisations. The Goldfields Indigenous Housing Organisation covers Kalgoorlie, Leonora and Coolgardie. It has 48 properties and provides support services for around 280 tenants and household members. The member for North West Central and the member for Moore will be familiar with the Murchison Region Aboriginal Corporation. It covers Geraldton, Northampton, Denham, Carnarvon, North Midlands, Mullewa, Yalgoo and Meekatharra and it has 120 houses. Noongar Mia Mia is based in Perth. It houses up to 368 people and has 91 tenancies. In my former role as the Leader of the Nationals, I had the pleasure of meeting representatives from the Southern Aboriginal Corporation on various different occasions. It does a raft of things in Albany, as the Acting Speaker (Ms R.S. Stephens) will be very well aware. It has 75 properties and supports over 100 families.

All these organisations talk about the importance of providing people with the safety and dignity of having a roof over their heads and supporting them to be on a pathway to economic independence. It is not just about having a rental, but about transitioning into home ownership. These Aboriginal community housing organisations are best placed to shift the dial on what we see as some of the most unacceptably high numbers. It will be familiar to everyone who spends any time in the housing or community sectors that although four per cent of our population are Aboriginal

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or Torres Strait Islander, well over 50 per cent of them are in our community housing and funding streams. I commend the government for providing the COVID grant through Lotterywest to give Shelter WA the opportunity to capacity build these four organisations, and hopefully there will be more for them to continue down this pathway through Shelter WA.

We had this lovely glossy brochure on the day, and all the organisations and people who had helped to consult and bring this together were there. But what was missing was a commitment from this very wealthy state government to kickstart that partnership and to indicate to the private sector and the philanthropic organisations that it will be engaging with that it not only saw value in creating the brochure and empowering Shelter WA to go down this path, but also will put some money on the table to assist in expanding and supporting those services to grow. I truly believe—I have heard members opposite talk about this on a regular basis—that if we want to shift the dial on the challenges that some of our Aboriginal communities and individuals face, Aboriginal community-controlled and owned organisations are the answer to that. Whether someone is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, housing is one of the real challenges with the cost of living. We can empower and support ACHOs to deliver more housing by providing them with funds to purchase and build houses. My understanding from interaction with these community organisations is that they can do it much cheaper than the state government can, and they generally get a better tenancy outcome for their tenants because they have a better relationship with their tenants; they support them one on one. I have nothing against the people who work at the department of housing; that is a tough job. My office deals with people who are the interface in my community and across the state on a regular basis. It is hard. Maybe I am naive, and I am not reflecting on this government or the previous one, but as I have come closer to this issue, I have not understood why we do not provide more funding to these community-run organisations, particularly community housing organisations. There is a huge opportunity now that we have a Minister for Housing saying that he is doing everything he can to put on the list a further increase in the funds to those community organisations. I have one in my electorate, but it is not one of the big four. There are multiple little community-run organisations that could use some capacity building and support to allow them to deliver local solutions on the ground, particularly to make sure that we shift the number of people in public housing onto a sustainable pathway. For those cabinet ministers sitting opposite, there is one solution. I would fully support more funding going to those big four organisations. They are not big; they are small organisations that do an enormous amount on the smell of an oily rag. Then perhaps down the track, as Shelter WA does more of that work to engage with the sector, more organisations will start to come online. There should be a funding stream to support that as well.

That was the first thing on my list. The second thing on my list is transport. This was the second issue that the Western Australian Council of Social Service identified in its submission. This will come as no surprise, as we have raised this on a regular basis. The price of fuel is high. Inflation is high. Car loan repayments are going up. More of the household budget is going towards having a car. Although I acknowledge that the government has made some changes to public transport access in the Perth metropolitan area, it is more challenging for those who live in regional Western Australia. Regional airfare caps are great for those communities that need interconnection between Perth and their region, but the predominant form of transport in the regions would have to be the car, particularly in my electorate, unless someone jumps on the *Prospector* to go to Kalgoorlie. They might even get the *AvonLink* if they get out of bed at sparrow's and maybe they will get back to Northam if they are lucky—that schedule is a bit challenging! Public transport is pretty limited, so we rely very much on a car. That is linked to getting to employment, doctors' appointments and family—just staying connected. It is just a fact of life in regional Western Australia. We are heavily reliant. I heard members talk about transport links earlier in the debate on the bill that is before the house at the moment. That is a whole other issue. There are challenges for families in maintaining their car loan repayments and with the price of fuel. Here is where the government could provide some relief. It has control of car registration and driver's licence charges. There could be an additional subsidy or a reduction in those charges, even if it was temporary, just to take the pressure off so that people do not have to decide whether they will pay their car rego or put food on the table.

The next thing I want to talk about is food. That is what people do: they trade off whether they are going to pay their utility bills or put food on the table. We all know that Foodbank Australia, Vinnies and everyone providing food relief is saying that they are seeing more and more people walk through their doors. That means that we have to pull the pressure off. The government has a lever—that is, drivers' licences, car regos and, particularly in regional Western Australia, the Country Age Pension Fuel Card and the Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card. The Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Card was worth \$2 000 when we left government. In the first year that this government came to power, it was slashed to \$1 000, which will do almost nothing for a brigade. It might fill one car up twice. That is something the government could do to support our emergency services volunteers, whom we rely on in regional Western Australia. The Country Age Pension Fuel Card has not been indexed for the entire time that this government has been in power. The government could deal with the unreasonable surcharges being applied by, I would say, unthoughtful vendors. These people are vulnerable; age pensioners, disability pensioners and carers are eligible for the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. When there are charges of between 1.5 and 1.75 per cent,

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surely there is something the government could do to try to make sure that the full value of the card is in the hands of those pensioners. A number of people have contacted my office and there has been some media about this over the last 12 months. I am not just raising it on the eve of budget day. This is something that the government surely should be aware of. It would be disappointing if regional MPs from the Labor Party had not raised it as something that could deliver real support for members in their communities, as well as in other regional communities across the state. The Country Age Pension and Emergency Services Volunteer Fuel Cards could be increased immediately. It is not a big amount, but it would make an enormous difference to eligible individuals in those communities. It would not surprise anyone that food, energy and water were also on the Western Australian Council of Social Service's list.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** WACOSS and the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre have done some work on how people make decisions when they are under financial pressure. Essentially, they found that the strategy families under financial pressure are most likely to use to cope with being unable to pay utility bills and other bills that come through the door is to reduce spending on food and groceries, and leisure activities. Leisure activities can mean anything. People probably need to tighten their belt if they go out to have a meal every night. I understand that. It is not ideal. But I would also include things like kids sport under leisure activities. I have heard the members for North West Central and Roe raise in this house that more and more families are having to choose which sport their kids can engage in. As a former Minister for Sport and Recreation, I know the KidSport program that we put in place and was carried through to this government is really important. But even with that support, families are having to choose whether their kids do summer sport, winter sport or any sport at all, and that really devastates me. As a person who comes from a family who made me try everything under the sun, against my will on most occasions—I am not a particularly sporty person—I understand the benefits of being involved in team sport in particular, and as a kid, I learnt how to win, to lose, to volunteer and to stay healthy and connected to my community. I think it is devastating when a family, particularly a big family, is unable to offer that opportunity to their kids. That is another opportunity for the state government; it could provide additional support through KidSport or other mechanisms to make sure that families do not have to make that choice, because we grow little citizens by allowing them to participate in sport. We too often talk about antisocial behaviour and kids who are not engaged in their community, but I see in my electorate, and many members would see in their electorates, wonderful opportunities for people to be part of a club and to be part of something bigger than themselves. They can aspire to run onto Optus Stadium and be the next Buddy Franklin or whoever the biggest football star is at the moment.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** You should talk about the Dockers.

**Ms M.J. DAVIES:** I cannot talk about the Dockers. Member for Roe, I am quietly cheering them on, but I have to tell you that I have joined the East Fremantle Football Club, at its urging, as the daughter of a former player, and have gone to the WAFL to seek joy in the football world at the moment. But that is the point. People need to be able to take part in things, and that is another thing the state government could look at. All these things could be wrapped together to make it more affordable for Western Australian families when the state government hands down a significant budget surplus for the third year.

The Minister for Water touched on the importance of regional child care. We talk about women in particular returning to the workforce to participate fully in the economy so that they are able to put food on the table and keep a roof over their head, and child care is an important part of that. I know there is an intersection of federal regulations and funding and the state government. In regional Western Australia, both sides of government have supported the development of innovative models, such as the Regional Early Education and Development Inc model, which was home grown in the wheatbelt and has the potential to be expanded across regional Western Australia. It is suffering like every other organisation from workforce shortages. That is why the minister was talking about it—training. I was listening. This is me on a Wednesday afternoon. The Minister for Training was talking about how it is important to provide training for that particular workforce, and I could not agree more. I do not want to hear from anyone that opposition members stand up and whinge. I have given credit where credit is due this afternoon on things that I think are important. I think the government can do more. There are opportunities to support innovative models like REED to make sure that the government is growing that workforce to come in, and the model can be tweaked for whatever part of the regions it is trying to service. Whether or not it is partnering with private sector operators, there is an opportunity there. I give that freely as a person who has been on that childcare journey with the group of people who started the model from a little acorn back when we were trying to deal with the complete failure of childcare services in regional Western Australia, particularly in the wheatbelt. If something can be made to work in the wheatbelt, it can be made to work almost anywhere, because we are a big area with small population centres. Innovative service models that think outside the box are the sorts of things that would have received, and did receive, funding from royalties for regions and Lotterywest under the former government to make sure that

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services were available. All those things knitted together make it easier for families and households to make their budgets work.

I want to finish by saying how important it is that this government recognises the privileged position it is in with the surplus sitting in its coffers and that too many people in Western Australia are under financial pressure at the moment. I talked about housing and the input costs that people juggle. There are state government levers in all those areas that can be pulled to try to relieve that pressure. Like the member for North West Central, I am hopeful, not optimistic, that we will see some of that revealed tomorrow so that I can go back to my electorate and tell the organisations I have been dealing with through my portfolios that there is a pathway and a glimmer of hope that their services will not be under such significant pressure and that they will be able to contribute to their community to their fullest potential instead of worrying every night about whether they will be able to put food on the table for their family. To me, that is completely unacceptable in a state like Western Australia.

**MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education)** [6.37 pm]: I will make a brief contribution because I know that the member for Mirrabooka would also like to make a brief contribution. I will start by saying how refreshing it was to hear the member for Central Wheatbelt's contribution to the debate tonight. It was more of a contest of ideas, and if we have more of that, I think it will be great for this place. I think about the contribution from the Leader of the Liberal Party, who suggested our financial position is due to good luck, not management. I suggest she is the one who has had good luck in becoming the leader, given there are only two Liberal members; it was not through good management. The member for Central Wheatbelt will be missed in 2025, and perhaps she should reconsider her decision because she has a lot to contribute to not only her electorate, but also the state.

I was particularly interested in the member's reference to housing solutions led by Aboriginal people. I cannot speak for the Minister for Housing—I do not intend to—but it made me reflect on my experience since December in these important portfolios. Certainly, many families and children are facing complex issues that fall under my portfolios, and the solutions offered and delivered by Aboriginal organisations throughout the regions give the best results. I have travelled throughout the state. Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Aboriginal Corporation is rolling out the Target 120 program in Newman. It is doing it really well because it has a commitment to and a relationship and trust with the local community. Likewise, MG Corporation is rolling out the program in Kununurra.

Although the government supports Aboriginal community-controlled organisations certainly in my portfolios and is looking wherever, we need to continually build their capacity to do that important work. It will not happen just because we all want it to happen; these organisations need support and resources to be able to do the important work they do. They face similar challenges to all organisations around the state, whether they are not-for-profits, government agencies, local governments or local businesses. One of the most challenging aspects is in getting people to work in these organisations. After travelling throughout the state, I can honestly say that what I heard most was not "Give me more money, minister"; it was "We cannot spend the money we have because we do not have people to help us deliver the services." That is not an excuse; workforce capacity is a really challenging aspect that underlies many of the issues the state faces right now, and it will continue to be an issue. That is not an excuse; it is an indisputable challenge for everyone who is working in the Department of Communities in particular.

I want to quickly mention the cost-of-living issue. The state government gets some criticism—I note that the member for Cottesloe criticised the government for this again tonight—that the electricity relief previously offered to all Western Australians amounted to \$1 000. I think what many of us realise when we go back to our electorates is that cost-of-living stresses are being faced by many Western Australians right now. Many of the impacts on the cost of living are caused by world economic levers not of our making. Interest rates are affecting cost-of-living pressures, as is inflation. Although they are not of our making, it is important that we not only talk about the vulnerable and most needy people, which is a particular area of focus of my portfolios, but also acknowledge that cost-of-living pressures are spreading far and wide. It is important that when we talk about cost-of-living relief, we provide relief for all Western Australians, whether through electricity credits or by providing transport relief through the two-zone cap on fares. I know that has provided massive relief for many families in the northern suburbs, who are saving thousands of dollars by not having to pay for more than two zones. Cost-of-living impacts are being felt broadly in the community; it is a challenging time for everyone.

I will briefly touch on my portfolio, and will carry on from the comments of the member for Central Wheatbelt. The member for North West Central also spoke about some of the issues faced by communities and towns around the state. From all the work I have seen in my portfolios, I strongly believe that the solutions lie in early intervention. Early intervention does not come easily or quickly, and it costs a lot of money. I am very proud that since 2017, our focus has been on early intervention in all its forms, whether with youth through Target 120 or in the child protection space by working intensively to prevent children being removed from families. We want kids to stay with families. We have invested over \$136 million in that important work to support families to be able to better support their children. That work will continue. It is paying dividends. It is making a difference in young people's

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lives so that they can be productive and contribute to our society. I want to particularly highlight what the Minister for Education was saying, which fits into the ethos that we are developing at the Department of Communities. It is about providing not only monetary support for people but also support for skills so that people can take charge of their own lives and be able to make a contribution. I think that is a really important element of it.

I also just want to quickly finish on this notion. I think the member for North West Central was much more constructive, but I would not give that same recognition to other opposition members. We are sitting on this mountain of gold. We have this massive surplus and this money in the coffers. I am always a bit confused when I hear that from the opposition, because it is what allows good governments to respond to the social challenges and to support families and children. Without having a good economic set of books, we cannot go out and support people. We can but we will end up going into debt, and we can see that right around Australia. Massive debts have been incurred by states all over the place and invariably they will have less capacity to support communities or to put in place particular measures or programs to support people.

I am proud of our government's record of being responsible managers of the state's finances. I am proud not to say it has a surplus but to say it gives us that opportunity to be responsible in delivering programs and initiatives that make a real difference. We need to think back not too far. We just faced a pandemic. Despite a pandemic, during which the government invested over \$11 billion, this state was the only state that was able to stay in a strong financial situation, which now gives us the capacity to support people who are doing it tough and people who are struggling with the cost of living. When we talk about electricity charges and other charges, we acknowledge that Western Australia by comparison is doing very well. That is not good luck. It is not good fortune. It is through six years of discipline around the cabinet table.

All ministers want to spend more money because there are always more wonderful things to do and more people to support, but it is called being disciplined so that we stay in a strong economic position and can keep supporting Western Australians. I am very proud of that. I know when the Premier delivers the budget tomorrow, the majority of Western Australians will also respond by saying we have got the state in a good position. People are out there working. We have created 120 000 jobs since 2021 alone. We have the capacity in the Western Australian community for people to participate in the workplace to try to build a better life. I am really proud of that.

**MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka — Parliamentary Secretary)** [6.48 pm]: I am very happy to have the opportunity to speak against this motion. I have been listening to the debate this afternoon and contemplating the motion that has been put. It is important that we reflect on it. The motion states —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to use the upcoming 2023–24 state budget to address the many failures impacting Western Australian families and households.

What we heard from the opposition members who spoke on this motion was just a shopping list. It was almost like a parade of their favourite issues. It is interesting that as each of those members made their contribution to this motion, which is so broad and meaningless that it enabled them to talk about anything they wanted, we could see who the performers are.

**Mr P.J. Rundle** interjected.

**Ms M.J. HAMMAT:** I have to say that there are not many performers on the opposition bench. It really has been a dismal affair today. I acknowledge that there were a couple of considered contributions. This motion is about anything that opposition members want it to be. We have been hearing from opposition members all afternoon, and at the end of that we still do not have a clear picture of who they are, what they believe and what they stand for, and, indeed, what they would do if they were in government. I accept that the member for Central Wheatbelt outlined a few policy initiatives, and that was really heartening and good to see, but from the other members of the opposition we did not hear much of substance.

It is hard to go past the member for Cottesloe's contribution. Someone should do the member for Cottesloe a service by telling him that sarcasm does not work in *Hansard*. His contribution about building houses for millionaires' children underlines the problem with this opposition. That is a silly comment about a serious and substantial issue. We know that housing is an important issue. It is on the minds of many people. That kind of glib commentary not only does him no service, but also does not do the debate any service. We can say a great deal about the things that are happening, but that was a very poor contribution.

I thank the member for Cottesloe for his contribution about how well we are doing in Collie. I am sure the member for Collie–Preston was heartened to hear the member's support for the incredible work that the McGowan government is doing in that region and in managing a very difficult economic transition. I also want to commend the member for Collie–Preston for her work in this area. This motion really could be about anything, but given that it has been moved on the eve of the state budget, and given the comments made by many members about how they are looking forward to the state budget tomorrow, as am I, I think opposition members were trying to craft a motion that would

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enable them to talk about budget initiatives and issues that are facing families and households. That is an important issue. It is a significant and worthwhile issue that we should be debating in this house.

I want to record that the people of Western Australia deserve better than what we got from the opposition today. I spend a lot of time in my electorate of Mirrabooka doorknocking and talking to everyday people to understand the issues that are on their minds and what I need to do as a good local member to advocate for them. The cost of living is a significant issue on people's minds. People deserve to get a much better contribution from the opposition parties than what we had today. The McGowan Labor government takes that commitment seriously. We understand that our job is to deliver better outcomes for everyday people in this state. That is what Labor governments do. One of the fundamental differences between a Labor government and the opposition parties is that we are serious about our responsibility to help everyday Western Australians. People only need to look at the record of our government on economic portfolios and social policies to see our absolute commitment to do everything we can to deliver on that responsibility.

There is so much that we could talk about today. There are so many things that the opposition has hung out there. What we need to drill down on a bit in the first instance is the cost of living. There can be no doubt that the McGowan Labor government has taken the issue of cost of living for everyday families incredibly seriously. We have been able to do that, as the Minister for Community Services said earlier, because we have taken budget repair seriously. In the early years of the first term of this government, we did significant work on budget repair. We are now also exercising ongoing discipline in budget management to ensure that families and households, everyday people, will get the support that they need to meet some of the economic challenges that they are experiencing at this time.

The \$400 energy credit was a feature of last year's budget, and it came on top of the \$600 that, from memory, was paid to people in 2020. As I have gone around and talked to my community in the electorate of Mirrabooka, I have learnt that this energy credit was incredibly well received. It was of significant benefit to everyday families. It went straight to the households that needed it, so this was a very good initiative. It was effective, and it was delivered at a time when people could access it. It was a very good policy initiative. I take this opportunity to commend the Premier; Treasurer for that policy, because it was incredibly well received.

In the same vein, I also want to talk about the policy of rolling out free rapid antigen tests. I think the member for Roe spoke about that and raised some concerns with that program. I want to be really clear that that policy was incredibly well received by the people in my electorate. Access to those tests made a fundamental difference to how people were able to manage through the pandemic. They have managed their health and their household finances because they did not have to buy RATs. One thing that we know about those tests is that when people have to buy them, they can be incredibly expensive. It is hard to remember now, because things have changed so quickly, but I can remember the lockdowns in Sydney and people in western Sydney were told that they could not travel out of their area or go to work unless they took a test every day, but people could not get their hands on a test. That had enormous ramifications for those people and their ability to go to work. But in this state, along with the good health management of the pandemic, we made sure that people had access to rapid antigen tests.

Last week I had the good pleasure of visiting the Balga Autumn Club, and a number of its members were not there because they had COVID. The one thing that the club wanted was access to rapid antigen tests. For our senior citizens, many of whom are on low incomes, this policy initiative made a real difference to them in not only their economic management, but also how they managed their health and wellbeing through the peak of the COVID pandemic and today. I think that is very important.

I also want to include in that list of issues the two-section fare cap for public transport. It is an incredible initiative. It is fantastic. Public transport is available at a cost that is reasonable for families. It ensures that they can travel on the excellent and outstanding public transport that we have in this state. Again, I get a lot of positive feedback about that initiative. For many people, the recent announcement of being able to travel free on Sundays is a fantastic way for them to access public transport.

One of the things that is most galling about the debate tonight is having to listen to members opposite talk about the cost of living. If we look at the track record of this government compared with their performance when they were in government, there is no question we have managed the economy better and have redistributed the benefits of that good economic management to everyone. We have done a far better job than members opposite did to ensure that household fees and charges remain affordable for everyday people. It is instructive to look at the opposition's performance when it was in government. Never mind what members opposite say in the debate about what they believe, think or feel. Let us look at what they did when they had their hands on the levers of power. I thought the Minister for Training did a very good job of outlining what members opposite did to the training system when they had the opportunity. I thought she did a very good job of explaining that when members opposite had the levers of power, they jacked up the prices of TAFE courses, making them unaffordable for everyday people.



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But members opposite did not just do it to TAFE; they did the same thing to the important things like electricity prices. Do members opposite remember what they did to electricity prices when they had the opportunity? Under the Liberal–National government, electricity prices rose by 90 per cent, which was 8.4 per cent for every year. Water rates went up by 66 per cent. On top of all that, when members opposite left office, we had predicated in the forward estimates of the budget seven per cent rises in electricity prices and six per cent rises in water rates—all that on a path to a deficit of \$44 billion. Opposition parties come in here wanting to talk about what we are doing about the cost of living, but when they were in government, they put up prices by extremely high amounts, created enormous burdens for everyday people and did not do a single thing to alleviate that burden for everyday families. They did it with electricity, water and training and in a whole range of different areas. The track record of this government has been to keep those fees and charges low. When we look at the combined impact of the last budget on household fees and charges, including the \$400 electricity credit, we see that the total increase to families was less than inflation. That is not something that the opposition parties can say they did when they had the opportunity. They did not do it. It is, I think, extremely rich.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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