

Speaker; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Eric Ripper; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Marmion; Dr Kim Hames; Acting Speaker;
Mr David Templeman; Mr Troy Buswell

HOSPITAL SUPPORT WORKERS

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr G.A. Woodhams): Today I received within the prescribed time a letter from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the following terms —

I wish to raise the following as a matter of public interest today.

That this house supports fairer outcomes for workers and patients in WA hospitals and reaffirms Parliament's view that it values all hospital workers and the role they play in delivering quality hospital and health services for WA patients.

The SPEAKER: The matter appears to me to be in order. If at least five members stand in support of the matter being discussed, the matter can proceed.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.06 pm]: I move —

That this house supports fairer outcomes for workers and patients in WA hospitals and reaffirms Parliament's view that it values all hospital workers and the role they play in delivering quality hospital and health services for WA patients.

The Department of Health is under siege. It is beset on many fronts. Today we are talking about the battle that the health department is engaged in with some of its lowest paid workers in our hospital system—the hospital support workers. Firstly, though, I will look at the impact that this government's policies have had on health. We reported last week that ambulance ramping in emergency departments over the winter months has risen to record levels under this government. In June, July and August 2009 we had about 1 900 hours of ambulance ramping—that is, ambulances stuck outside emergency departments with patients waiting to be received. That figure rose to 2 200 hours in 2010. In his usual defence, the Minister for Health jumped up and down and said, "McGinty did it; so can I." The fact remains that ambulance ramping continues to get worse under this government and the health services in our emergency departments continue to deteriorate.

The minister talks at length about the success of the four-hour rule. The four-hour rule is a train wreck in slow motion. If we travel forward to October, we will possibly see all but one of the hospitals in the metropolitan area failing to meet the four-hour rule targets in emergency departments. This was a policy initiative that the minister announced with great pride after he discovered it on his desk on his first day as Minister for Health. Quite simply, it is a program that has failed.

As we have observed on many occasions, many more thousands of people are on elective surgery waiting lists now than there were when the government came to power. Over 7 000 people have been added to the waiting list. They are waiting for pain-relieving surgery, particularly in the all-important category 3, yet this government is incapable of repeating the success that the previous Labor government had in keeping elective surgery waiting lists down.

We have the relentless privatisation program, a policy of this government to outsource as much of the hospital system as it can. Despite the guffaws from the member for Vasse, the hospital in his electorate is also one that the department is targeting for a privatisation program. We know that the government is keen to outsource as much as it can of the new services at Fiona Stanley Hospital. We know it is keen to privatise holus-bolus the Midland hospital campus. We know that it has an appetite for privatising as much of the new Princess Margaret Hospital for Children as possible. We also know that it is running like a jack rabbit away from that little landmine because it is concerned about the public backlash. It knows that privatisation of the hospital system is poison in the mind of the community and it knows that this is one policy initiative that it will live to regret.

I now turn to the issue of hospital support workers. For members who are unfamiliar, hospital support workers are some of the lowest paid workers in our hospital system, and they include orderlies, cleaners and people working in catering and patient support services. The role of hospital support workers is incredibly important, not because they are necessarily considered to be on the front line providing services directly to patients, but because the services they provide directly to hospitals ensure that doctors and nurses have the equipment and resources they need to hand and ensure that hospitals work smoothly. Importantly, hospital orderlies are responsible for ensuring that we do not have access block behind our emergency departments; that is, they ensure that patients are moved on and hospital beds are made available earlier in the day, and they ensure that the four-hour rule is a success. It beggars belief that the Minister for Health should target these valuable workers for such harsh treatment during their enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations. It is harsh treatment because we know that the minister has a very different point of view when it comes to the most senior officials in the

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hospital system. It was recently revealed that senior departmental officials would receive a 3.5 per cent pay increase in the course of just one year. The pay increase for some of the highest paid in the Department of Health represents upward of \$15 000 in a single pay rise. We can juxtapose that with the government's treatment of hospital support workers, who are paid around the \$40 000 mark. They are not highly paid, but they play a very important role. The government's treatment of these workers is to offer a pay increase of 8.25 per cent over three years.

Mr W.R. Marmion: It is actually nine.

Mr R.H. COOK: I understand that that number is in dispute. Whether it is 8.25 per cent or nine per cent, we know that the pay increase is a pittance compared with what the minister is prepared to pay the department's senior officials. I am pleased that the Minister for Commerce has entered the debate, because when debate on these pay negotiations started, the Minister for Health would immediately point behind his shoulder to the former Minister for Commerce and say, "Don't talk to me about wages and staffing; talk to the guy behind me." We have had none of that over the past 24 hours. All of a sudden, the Minister for Commerce is missing in action; he does not even enter the debate! I do not know whether the government is purposely hiding the Minister for Commerce from the media. I do not know whether the government has decided to now sideline the Minister for Commerce in the application of this part of its wages policy, but now the Minister for Health is front and centre defending the wages policy that he knows stinks. The minister knows it stinks because previously he did his best to disown it. He said "No; blame the Minister for Commerce or the Treasurer."

Several members interjected.

Mr R.H. COOK: The Minister for Health is now having to come out in front of the media and try to defend the indefensible.

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): Members!

Mr R.H. COOK: What does 8.25 per cent, or let us just say nine per cent, over three years actually represent in these people's wages? The pay rise currently on offer is about \$19 a week—a pitiful amount given the sort of pressures that these people are under after their fees and charges were ramped up by the Barnett government. The hospital support workers are on the one hand facing the pressures of a government that is happy to increase electricity and water bills, but on the other hand they face a government that is stomping all over their pay claim in a mean-spirited way.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): Order! I have given the call to the member for Kwinana.

Mr R.H. COOK: To add insult to injury, some members may not be aware that the government is undertaking another little exercise in increasing fees and charges; that is, all hospital workers will be hit with increased fees in hospital car parks. For instance, from 1 January next year, a hospital orderly working at Fremantle Hospital who drives to work each day for five days a week and parks his or her car at the hospital will be paying \$10 a week more for parking. Compare that with an extra \$19 a week that the minister now says is an adequate pay increase. The minister says that notwithstanding the fact that hospital support workers now pay increased fees and charges for their water and electricity, they will also pay increased parking fees. The government is essentially saying that hospital orderlies are now worth only \$9 extra a week! It is known that these people are under pressure. It is known that hospital support workers are struggling because they are missing out on the boom that this government is so busily trying to hide from them. It is known that these workers are struggling most of all. It is known that they are valuable and absolutely integral to the smooth running of hospitals. But this government in its mean-spirited and ridiculous approach to wages policy is doing its best to ensure that hospital support workers do not share in the boom.

As I said, the Minister for Health is a latecomer to the debate, but he has used the past 24 hours to suggest that he will take responsibility for this government's wages policy. In the media yesterday, he suggested that we should not be too harsh on the government, and even though the government has been negotiating for three months over this matter, that pay increase is not the final offer. The minister says that perhaps there will be more money later. He claimed that negotiations are going smoothly, even though, after three months, the Department of Health refuses to move on the question of pay rates.

The Department of Health also refuses to move on another point; that is, there is a provision in the current enterprise bargaining agreement that ensures that the government will not seek to privatise or outsource the health support workers' jobs. It will not come as any surprise to members that this is a sticking point in the negotiation. The government is determined to pull those sorts of provisions out of the current award because it is hell-bent on privatising as much of the health system as possible. It is not surprising that the orderlies, the

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caterers and the patient care assistants are a little reluctant to agree to a provision in their agreement that suggests that their jobs will no longer exist. It is not surprising that the hospital support workers are a little reluctant to go down the path, as the government did in the 1990s, of privatising cleaning services and orderly services in our hospital system because they saw what a disaster it was the last time it was done. The minister said that the government has not finished yet, as it is just starting to have fun, and that the government has started the negotiation process and it is going swimmingly. Minister, it is not going swimmingly for those workers who have now been in negotiations for three months trying to achieve some sort of decent outcome. Questions have to be asked: Why the delay? Why is the minister continuing to play games if this is not the government's final offer? Why is the minister not prepared to now put a decent adequate offer on the table that both recognises the fact that hospital support workers have had significant increases in cost-of-living expenses and they will have significant increases in car parking and other work-related expenses? Why is the minister so determined that this clause of the agreement be taken out if he is not equally determined to privatise hospital support workers' jobs at the first available opportunity? Why will the minister not enter into a mature and deliberate negotiation process that makes some progress, rather than this stonewalling and obstinate approach of refusing to move? That was the approach of the previous Minister for Commerce. Now that the Minister for Health is clearly taking responsibility for this policy area, we want to see progress in the negotiations. These workers should be able to enjoy a standard of living that is commensurate with the sort of prosperity that the state is now experiencing. Their wage claims should be taken seriously. The government should sit down in a mature and constructive process and negotiate a decent outcome for these workers, not only because they play an important role in the hospitals, but also because it is upon them that the minister's four-hour rule depends for its success.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [3.22 pm]: This motion has three aspects. The first is fairness for low-paid workers in the health industry. The second is poor patient outcomes. The third is bad government planning for the future.

I turn to the first aspect, which relates to fairness for low-paid workers in the health industry. These people are struggling with massive and savage increases in their electricity and water bills. They do not earn high wages. The big increases mean a lot to them in their day-to-day lives. What has the government offered them? It has offered 8.25 per cent over three years. Quite frankly, the government has put a mean, hard-hearted and miserable wages offer on the table. It is time for the government to change its wages policy, which was developed in the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis. We are not in the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis. Western Australia's economic and financial position is significantly improved since the period just after the GFC struck.

Mr T.R. Buswell interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: Member for Vasse, the former Labor government offered 4.5 per cent, generally speaking. The member for Vasse is the sort of hard-hearted right-winger who will be a danger to the public if he is again given a ministerial position. It will not be good for the community if he is brought back into the ministry. We will say that over and again.

The government needs to change its wages policy. What concerns me is that the government may change its wages policy when it confronts a big wages claim from doctors later this year; or it may change its wages policy when it confronts a wages claim from Western Australia's nurses. What I fear is a double injustice for these low-paid hospital support workers because not only will they not be given any assistance to deal with the member for Vasse's huge and savage increases in utility bills, but also they will be the last people persecuted by the coalition government's post-GFC wages policy. I want an assurance from the Minister for Health that there will not be one policy for our hospitals' higher paid workers and another policy for our hospitals' lower paid workers.

I now refer to patient outcomes. Whatever propaganda the Minister for Health puts out, the government is not doing well on some of the basic metrics for hospital performance. In July we learnt that 30 per cent more patients in regional Western Australia are waiting for elective surgery. I have always regarded elective surgery as a misnomer. It is not elective if a person is waiting in pain because he needs a knee or hip replacement. Such surgery is necessary treatment that people are waiting for and not getting. The number of regional Western Australians on the waiting list was 3 648, which is an increase of 889 from the year before, or a 32.2 per cent increase. If we look at another metric, we see that in 2009 a record number of patients had their elective surgery cancelled—14 people a day or a total of 5 012 cancellations across the year. That metric shows that the government has not been performing well in the health service.

I now turn to the question of ambulance ramping. The number of hours that ambulances sat outside various hospitals in August was as follows: nearly 353 at Royal Perth Hospital; 198.5 at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital; 183.3 at Fremantle Hospital; 179.5 at Joondalup Health Campus; and 48.6 at Swan District Hospital. There were two days in August on which ambulance ramping amounted to 110 hours. Members should think about what that

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means. It means that our mothers, grandmothers and people who have been injured at work are in ambulances outside emergency departments waiting for the full treatment they need. They are not able to get into hospital emergency departments, let alone be treated within a reasonable period. On that metric the government is not performing very well.

Clearly, the government needs more resources in its health system. One of the tragedies of this debate is that more resources are available at no cost to the WA taxpayer. But those resources are not available because the government cannot negotiate an acceptable arrangement for the application of those resources with the federal government. The government has had an argument with the federal government and the other states about the share of the GST—the argument dates back to the deal signed by Richard Court and Peter Costello—and it is holding the patients of Western Australia hostage as it awaits a resolution of that deal. The government is sitting and waiting for the federal government to come to it while people in Western Australia are not getting the hospital treatment they need. Why is the Premier not in Canberra talking to the new government and trying to get a resolution to this issue? I do not like the idea of a goods and services tax clawback, but I like even less the idea that Western Australians are suffering when they could be getting the treatment they need but for an argument between Western Australia and the commonwealth, which the Premier is not taking action to resolve.

Finally, I will briefly talk about poor plans for the future. The government was extremely political during the last election. It brazenly, shamelessly and opportunistically campaigned on the question of keeping Royal Perth Hospital. The government has not sorted out what it will do with that hospital. It was fingered on this —

Dr K.D. Hames interjected.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The planning is very, very much in its infancy. The government does not know precisely what services it is going to offer at Royal Perth, nor how it will fund those services. The government was exposed for not having sorted out this issue in budget paper No 3 of its first budget. Obviously, the government got to Treasury because a very strange statement appears in the statement of risk in the previous budget, which refers to Royal Perth Hospital and the difficulties it has.

This issue involves unfairness and injustice to workers in the hospital system, poor patient outcomes, an unresolved problem with the federal government—which is costing WA patients—and plans for the future that are an absolute shemuzzle.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [3.28 pm]: This is another attack on the lowest paid in the community. As we have seen, there have been massive increases in electricity, gas and water charges and now the government has made unfair pay offers to the lowest paid in our community. There have been increasing costs for Western Australian families, particularly for the lowest paid in the community, and massive increases and charges, and now there is an inadequate pay offer from this arrogant and mean government.

During this debate I will highlight the issue of a prospective increase in car park charges on top of the massive increases in utilities. My office has been contacted by people who are extremely angry about the increases in car park charges that this government is about to implement. When the member for Kwinana was on his feet speaking about the increases in car park charges, what did the Minister for Health say? He said, “Well, you don’t pay if you don’t park there.” Seriously, these are people who have no choice; they do not have public transport at some of the hours that they are working and, of course, we know that public transport throughout the suburbs is inadequate and that this government is doing nothing to improve public transport. The government is increasing car park charges and giving people no option, and what does the heartless Minister for Health say? He says, “Well, they don’t pay if they don’t park there.” However, they have no choice.

Mr E.S. Ripper: If they want a job!

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: If they want a job—exactly! As I said, because of the shifts that people work, where people live and where the hospitals are, there need to be choices, yet people will be slugged increasing amounts while getting a poor pay rise offer. Let us go through some of these increases in the car park charges. From 1 January next year, Royal Perth Hospital will have a 10 per cent increase in car park charges; Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital will have an 80 per cent increase in charges for staff; Fremantle Hospital, 181 per cent; Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, 74 per cent; King Edward Memorial Hospital, 74 per cent; and, of course, there is also the introduction of new charges for suburban hospitals. These are massive increases in car park charges and when we compare them with the offer being made for the hospital workers’ pay rise, they will take out a significant part, if not the majority, of the proposed pay increases being offered.

We want to hear what this government proposes to do about not only the pay offer but also these new charges. I urge the government to reconsider the proposed increases in the car park charges. Families are already struggling with the massive increases in utilities—for water, electricity and gas—and now, on top of this, staff at our hospitals will have to incur this massive increase in car park charges. As I said, some people do not have a

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choice. They do not have the option to catch public transport because of the shifts that they are working and the lack of public transport throughout the suburbs. Therefore, I urge the government to reconsider its pay rise offer and these increases in car park costs because it is simply unfair. I have been contacted by very angry health workers about what this government is proposing to do.

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Commerce) [3.32 pm]: I rise in relation to the matter of public interest —

Mr R.H. Cook: Are you involved in this issue?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, I am actually. I agree with some of the sentiments of the motion; namely, this house supports fair outcomes for workers and patients in WA hospitals and reaffirms Parliament's view that it values all hospital workers and the role they play in delivering quality hospital and health services in WA. I have been around; I have lived in a lot of towns and I have been to the hospitals. I have five children who were delivered in hospitals. I think that everyone in this house would agree that hospital workers, whether they are doctors, nurses, nursing aides or orderlies, all do a wonderful job to support the community. I think that there would not be one person in this house who would disagree with that. In fact, we are lucky to have such a wonderful health system thanks to the Minister for Health, who is delivering a great job for Western Australia.

Dr K.D. Hames: And previous ministers!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I must acknowledge the previous health ministers as well. I also acknowledge that a lot of the hospital workers work difficult hours, they do shift work and they deal with people when they are probably at their worst moment, so they are compassionate, professional and dedicated people. Therefore, we all agree that the people who work in the health system do a wonderful job for Western Australia.

In relation to the industrial relations issue, the secretary of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union has reported that the government has offered 8.25 per cent, but it is actually nine per cent. That is in line with CPI, which is government policy.

Ms J.M. Freeman: What's CPI?

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is the consumer price index —

Ms J.M. Freeman: I know what it is, but —

Dr K.D. Hames: Are you in your seat?

Mr W.R. MARMION: The member is in the wrong seat!

Point of Order

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member for Nollamara is speaking from other than her seat.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): I remind members that all interjections are disorderly and they may contribute to the debate only from their own seats.

Debate Resumed

Mr W.R. MARMION: The member knows what CPI is. I do not know whether the member knows what the current figures for CPI are, but I can —

Ms J.M. Freeman: I want to know what your forecast is.

Mr T.R. Buswell: It is in the budget! All you have to do is open it up and take a look.

Ms J.M. Freeman: I know that, member.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I can tell the member what they are, if she likes. The CPI figures for the current three years are 2.75 per cent, 3.3 per cent and 3.25 per cent.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Are they the forecasted figures?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes. It is a total of 9.3 per cent over three years, and we have offered nine per cent at the moment.

Ms J.M. Freeman: So not even the CPI; less than CPI!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Nollamara, I have given the call to the Minister for Commerce.

Mr W.R. MARMION: That was CPI when offered. We think that is a fair offer. The government has to balance a fair offer with its budget. We have delivered eight agreements since I became minister, in fact, and they have

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involved about 8 000 employees. All have been delivered within CPI or the wages policy, which is a bit higher, as members know.

Ms R. Saffioti: So did all the EBAs agree to get CPI?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Or wages policy. With the wages price index, there need to be some trade-offs. All agreements under my watch, all eight agreements —

Ms R. Saffioti: Sorry, is that under your watch or the government's?

Mr W.R. MARMION: All eight agreements —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: There have been only eight concluded agreements.

Ms R. Saffioti: Okay, but is that under your watch or under the government?

Mr W.R. MARMION: The government and my watch.

Ms R. Saffioti: But isn't the watch within your government?

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is. There have been only eight agreements since the wages policy has come online. They have all come in and I will tell members what they are. The State Law Publisher agreement was for increases of 3.25 per cent and 3.25 per cent, so that is 6.5 per cent over two years.

Ms R. Saffioti: That is more than these guys!

Mr W.R. MARMION: No, it is not. The Main Roads Civil Service Association of WA enterprise agreement —

Point of Order

Mr R.H. COOK: The minister appears to be reading from an official document. I ask that he table that document because it will obviously provide us with some excellent information.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Commerce, when you have finished your contribution, if I could please see the notes that you are reading from and determine whether they are indeed an official document.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Certainly.

Debate Resumed

Mr W.R. MARMION: I only got up to Main Roads. In negotiation with the CSA, it was an increase of 5.75 per cent —

Ms R. Saffioti: What over?

Mr W.R. MARMION: Two years—3.25 per cent and 2.5 per cent. The VenuesWest agreement, which was with the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, was, over three years, three per cent, 2.75 per cent and 3.25 per cent. I have added that up to nine per cent over three years.

Dr K.D. Hames: That is pretty much the same.

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is about the same. The education assistants general agreement—this is an important one—involved 6 882 employees —

Ms J.M. Freeman: Minister, that wasn't an agreement; that was an arbitration decision. To call that an agreement that you've negotiated is so not —

Mr R.H. Cook: Are you trying to mislead the house?

Mr W.R. MARMION: It is an outcome, but guess what? The outcome came in within the wages policy.

Ms J.M. Freeman: No, it didn't.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, it did. It was 11 per cent—3.75 per cent —

Ms J.M. Freeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! It is impossible for Hansard to record any part of this debate at present. Please stop interjecting or I will be forced to call members. Minister, you have the call.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I acknowledge that it was an arbitration outcome, but the arbitration outcome acknowledged our wages policy.

Ms J.M. Freeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Nollamara, I call you for the first time.

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Mr W.R. MARMION: The 11 per cent was a high outcome and it was arbitrated. As I was trying to say, it was 3.75 per cent, 3.75 per cent and 3.5 per cent. In the cross-sector Government Services (Miscellaneous) General Agreement, which involved 2 233 workers—I agree that this gain was an arbitrated outcome—it was three per cent, 2.75 per cent and three per cent, which I calculate as being 8.75 per cent, which is again within the wages policy and less than that which has been offered here. In the Department of Culture and the Arts, the Storemen (Government)—Department of Culture and the Arts—Agreement was a negotiated agreement that came in at three per cent, 2.75 per cent and three per cent, which I calculate is 8.75 per cent, which is again below the wages policy. Then the Department of Culture and the Arts Retail Staff Agreement 2010 was three per cent, 2.75 per cent and three per cent, which is again 8.75 per cent.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Will you take an interjection on that? How many workers did it cover?

Mr W.R. MARMION: A small number.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Four workers!

Mr W.R. MARMION: It was a small number of workers. Those figures that I read out cover 8 000 workers. I give members this data: over the last term of the previous government the blow-out in public sector employee expenses and numbers saw an average increase in total wage cost of 9.6 per cent per annum. This accelerated to 11.7 per cent in 2007–08 and 12.6 per cent in the 11 months to May 2009. We cannot afford to have that growth. Opposition members know that we cannot afford to have this growth. Wages represent 40 per cent of total government recurrent spending.

Ms J.M. Freeman: I ask a serious question. What did teachers get?

Mr T.R. Buswell: It was pre-wages policy.

Ms J.M. Freeman: What did they get? You are Minister for Commerce; you tell me.

Mr W.R. MARMION: I was not the minister then and it was not under the wages policy.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.M. Harvey): Minister, perhaps you would address the Chair.

Mr P. Papalia: The police, under the disgraced former minister —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, I am calling you for the first time. Minister, please direct your comments to the Chair.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. I just want to reiterate that the two arbitrated hearings were very lengthy hearings. As I said, the Industrial Relations Commission granted 11 per cent to the education assistants over three years —

Ms J.M. Freeman: Over the wages policy.

Mr W.R. MARMION: No, there were trade-offs. It was 8.75 per cent for cleaners and gardeners, which was a good outcome and within the wages policy. If health workers accept the government's current offer, they will be significantly better off than people under some of the other agreements, which were for less than nine per cent. I believe that our wages policy is an appropriate balance between meeting the needs of the government and its employees and the strong fiscal position that the government has to maintain for Western Australia's economy. I therefore think that we are balancing a competitive economy with a fair wages system and we are ensuring that the taxpayers of Western Australia get the best value for money from the wages policy. I think that the government has implemented an outstanding criterion with the wages policy. I believe that it delivers good outcomes for the public service, as I have said.

Mr R.H. Cook: Good outcomes for a greedy, heartless government.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Kwinana!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I would like to conclude by saying that we all acknowledge the very good work that all the employees in the health sector do. I reflect on my time in Derby where a large percentage of the population are health workers. Not only do they deliver a terrific outcome for the health system, but also their interaction with the community is very good. I have nothing but praise for health workers. I believe that all members in this house value their work.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [3.45 pm]: I have gone through the wording of this matter of public interest motion, and I must say that it is wording that I very strongly support, bar one word, which I will address later. I strongly support the rest of the words in the motion, particularly the comment that

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this Parliament values all the hospital workers and the role that they play in delivering quality hospital and health outcomes.

Point of Order

Mr R.H. COOK: Madam Acting Speaker, you will recall that during the previous minister's speech I raised a point of order on what I thought were official documents, and he was going to present them to you at the conclusion of his speech. I just wanted to remind him that he was going to do that so that you could make a ruling.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister for Commerce, are they handwritten notes?

Mr W.R. MARMION: They are a mixture of both computer-generated and handwritten notes.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I do not think there is a point of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER: May I see the notes, please? I did say that I would see the notes. They are handwritten notes.

Debate Resumed

Dr K.D. HAMES: As I say, I strongly support the wording of the motion about the quality of our health workers. All of our hospital staff are currently providing exceptional services. We are under a huge amount of pressure. As the member for Kwinana stated earlier, things are difficult at our hospitals. We experienced a three per cent growth in demand last year and a six per cent growth in demand this year.

Madam Acting Speaker, it is inappropriate for someone from the other side to come and sit behind me and speak during my speech. I ask you to ask her to return to her seat. She is sitting there yakking behind my ear when I am trying to make a speech.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, members! Minister for Health, you have the call.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Thank you, Madam Acting Speaker. The hospitals have been under a huge amount of pressure in recent days because of that surging demand. While we are struggling with the four-hour rule, if we had not had that four-hour rule in place, we would have been under a huge additional amount of pressure. I believe that it is only the efficiencies that we have been able to generate within our hospital system that have allowed us to cope with that growth in demand in our hospitals.

What the Australian Medical Association said about bed numbers is correct: we do not have enough bed numbers in our system. The problem, of course, is that the hospitals we have got and the numbers that are out there have been static for a long time. It is actually not physically possible to create additional beds, particularly in tertiary hospitals, to cope with the increase in demand from patients. What we need is more beds but, as we know, they are not ready yet. Joondalup hospital is being built, and that was started under the previous government's watch. Fiona Stanley Hospital is being built, and that was started under the previous government's watch. Opposition members will recall, of course, that Fiona Stanley Hospital was due for completion in 2010, not 2013, which is currently the case, and due to open in 2014. The reality is if that had been opened and if Joondalup had been ready sooner and Rockingham hospital was ready, which was proposed in the original document that was put forward under the Reid review and the state government plans for health development, then we would not be in the situation we are in now. The reality is that those beds are not there, so we have to make sure that even if we do not meet those four-hour rule targets, we can continue to implement the process of the four-hour rule, which makes the whole hospital system operate more efficiently, otherwise we will not be able to cope with the numbers we have got.

Mr R.H. Cook: Minister —

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will do it in a second. We have got surging ramping numbers because of the huge growth in demand, which is the normal winter growth plus that six per cent. That will continue until we get those extra available beds because of the under capacity of our hospital still running at 95 to 100 per cent occupancy rates—figures that I criticised from opposition. It is still not as high as it was in August 2008, under the watch of the previous government. The record high for ramping levels happened under the previous government in August 2008.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Over 1 000, you say?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I have shown the graph to the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, I will table it and give the Leader of the Opposition a copy of the graph, which shows that the record high level happened in August 2008.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Those figures are not available to us unless you table them.

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Troy Buswell

Dr K.D. HAMES: I am happy to do that and show the Leader of the Opposition those figures. We are getting the latest figures; the graph for this month is definitely higher than it has been, but still not as high as it was under the Labor Party's watch. I will table it.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Minister, are you absolutely confident now that you can deliver Fiona Stanley Hospital within the new time?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, I am; on time and on budget. It is going swimmingly. It really is going exceptionally well. We are extremely happy with the progress and the costing, and it will be delivered on time and on budget.

I turn now to the effect of this increase in costs. We have already heard about what was offered, and I read a transcript of what Mr Dave Kelly had to say about what was being offered. He said that it was 8.25 per cent, and that is a blatant mistruth. I have seen the documentation that went to Mr Kelly in July, explaining the difference between the 8.25 per cent and the actual nine per cent that was being offered. The parties are in the middle of negotiations and they are discussing the final outcome. It is currently being negotiated, but the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union has decided to take political action. Similar negotiations are being undertaken on similar amounts of money in other professions with other unions, including the Australian Nursing Federation. They have chosen not to take industrial action, so why are we finding that the LHMU suddenly wants to take industrial action and that we are coincidentally here today, debating a matter of public interest?

Mr E.S. Ripper: The workers are on low wages and they're under pressure because of your bills!

Dr K.D. HAMES: We have to ask ourselves what effect that increase in prices will have. I have with me the Western Australian Council of Social Service household model document, which shows that despite the increases we have seen in some utility charges, the actual increase in charges for the average Western Australian household is 2.33 per cent. That is less than the amount that we are discussing. There are other factors, and I strongly support this group of workers getting the maximum they are able to negotiate within the confines of what government has to offer and what government does dealing with other issues. The LHMU is in negotiations and has agreed to those figures in other negotiations. It is in the final stages of negotiations with another group, yet it has decided to take action with this group. One has to ask oneself why that is, and what it is that the LHMU and Mr Dave Kelly in particular are seeking to achieve. It was interesting to read the comments made in the *Sunday Times*. I am sure members opposite have read them.

A matter was raised in this house last week about a donation made in the order of \$150 000 to try to gain favours from the National Party. However, let us look at what the LHMU has given the Labor Party. We know who the members are and one of them, in particular, is the person who has raised this MPI. We know which members are missos supporters. It is interesting that only three of the members who have been given their positions by the missos are in this house, supporting this MPI. How much was donated? It was \$430 000. In fact, \$200 000 was donated in 2008–09 alone. The National Party received a donation of \$150 000 from one of the richest men in Australia and copped flak from the opposition for it, while on the other side, some of the lowest-paid workers in this state are having money clawed off them to support the Labor Party to the tune of \$430 000. That is an amazing amount. The opposition talks about what such donations might buy; I do not know what \$430 000 might buy in government, but it obviously buys an MPI on health in this house, because the member who raised it happens to be a member of the union.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr E.S. RIPPER: The minister cannot allege that a member of Parliament has been bought to bring an MPI without moving a substantive motion.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I withdraw.

Debate Resumed

Dr K.D. HAMES: The LHMU has chosen to take political action with this particular group of workers, even though it has chosen not to take such action in other areas. It has gone to the Labor Party, seeking that the Labor Party bring an MPI before this house.

Mr R.H. Cook: No, they haven't.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Is the member saying that no members of the LHMU approached him to discuss him coming into this house with an MPI?

Mr R.H. Cook: Yes, that's what I'm saying.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I will accept the member at his word, but the reality is that certain members of the Labor Party are indebted to that union.

Extract from Hansard

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Speaker; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Eric Ripper; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Marmion; Dr Kim Hames; Acting Speaker;
Mr David Templeman; Mr Troy Buswell

Mr E.S. Ripper: I recommended to caucus that we have an MPI on this issue, and I have not spoken to the union about it.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Perhaps the union spoke to one of the other members of the party; maybe it did it through an alternate source. Perhaps I am just not asking the right question, or asking the question of the right member. The member did surprise me by saying no, I have to admit; he got me there. He did surprise me.

Mr R.H. Cook: I was not approached by the union, by a representative of the union, or anyone associated with the union. We decided that this is an important issue for health workers and Western Australian patients, something you clearly don't understand.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Obviously, someone has his eye on one of the seats on that side. I get on very well with the member for Bassendean, which is, I suspect, why he is now an independent and not a member of the missos.

Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I get on pretty well with the member for Bassendean, and I think he is a good member of Parliament, but the whisper that I hear is that a particular member has his seat very much targeted.

This motion is one that the government will support. Those workers do a fantastic job, and we recognise that they are the lowest-paid workers in our hospitals. I am very pleased to say that the union is negotiating extremely well with the government to try to reach an outcome, and I have confidence that we will be able to do so along the same lines as we have for the other workers represented by that union and for whom the union has already completed negotiations; others are close to being completed. I think this is just a bit of chest beating by the union to try to massage the government into supporting the best offer it can get. There is nothing all that wrong with that, provided, of course, it does not do any harm to the patients who are so dependent upon those workers to get good care in this state.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [3.58 pm]: I am happy to make a contribution, and I look forward with interest to the contribution of the member for Vasse. In the four minutes I have I want to highlight strongly to the government the opposition's very clear support for the lowest-paid workers in the health system, and the need for the government to demonstrate that its words are not hollow. The Minister for Health just told us that he supports them and the Minister for Commerce also said that he supports them, but when it comes to actually putting the money on the table and demonstrating its strong support, the government is found wanting. It has been found wanting again this afternoon because it has demonstrated once more that its words are hollow on this matter.

We need look only at the history of the Minister for Health in my area. The lowest-paid workers at the hospital in my area have been battling for more than 18 months for justice in their wage claim. What did the Minister for Health, one of two local members, do to support them? He did nothing. He refused to meet with any of the workers, some of whom are members of his electorate. They kept ringing his office and he put them off. He kept saying that he could see them on a Friday afternoon and then he changed the appointment. Tonight the minister will go home to his family and to his bed in his house in Yokine and claim \$255 as an allowance because he is a country member, but he will provide the lowest-paid workers in the hospital system only with what he considers an "adequate"—that is his word, and he said it about four times, as did the Minister for Commerce—increase of up to 50c an hour. That is a pathetic amount of money that does not demonstrate the words that the Minister for Health and the Minister for Commerce highlighted in the house in the past half an hour when they said that they support these low-paid workers in the hard work that they do to keep our hospital system working effectively. They have not given any demonstration of support for these people. When the Minister for Health gets picked up from Parliament House tonight by his state-driven car, he will drive about 10 kilometres to Yokine, go into his house, get into his bed and claim \$255 for the night, yet those workers in our hospitals throughout Western Australia are offered only an extra 50c an hour from the minister and this government, which he says is adequate. That is appalling. His words are hollow in this place, and so are the words of the Minister for Commerce. It demonstrates clearly that when ministers stand in this place and say that they support these people, they are absolutely hollow. They do not support these people, because their actions demonstrate that. The Minister for Health has admitted that his four-hour rule is stumbling. It was another borrowed idea from the United Kingdom. The next thing we will see is the Minister for Police saying that he is going to introduce the UK trend on Multanova cameras.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Never!

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: The police minister is introducing everything else that has failed over there, so why would he not bring this in?

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Mr David Templeman; Mr Troy Buswell

The fact is that there are people in this house who stand up for the lowest-paid workers, and they sit on this side of the house. I cannot see some of the new members, who have been bellowing when they stood in this place to make their inaugural speeches, supporting the workers in Geraldton and Joondalup. Where are the people who purport to represent regional Western Australia? They are failures and they do not support these workers at all. They never have and they never will. Only Labor will do it. Only Labor will stand up and make sure that these people are looked after.

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse) [4.02 pm]: Mr Acting Speaker —

Mr E.S. Ripper: This is the comeback speech.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: No; it is just a mere backbencher filling in a bit of time.

Mr R.H. Cook: Can you spell the word “rehabilitation”?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I like the member for Kwinana. I was trying to think of what he reminded me of and I thought of the comeback of *Hey Hey It's Saturday*. It is funny that the Leader of the Opposition should mention comebacks because the member for Kwinana is to Dave Kelly what Dickie Knee is to Daryl Somers—a puppet on a stick.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr A.P. O’Gorman): Members, I like to hear speeches in relative silence. The motion before the house is about fair outcomes for workers. That is the motion that we should be addressing, not other individuals across the chamber.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: He is a puppet on a stick who comes into this place and time after time does the bidding of his political masters in the miscellaneous workers’ union.

Amendment to Motion

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I feel compelled to move an amendment. I move —

That the motion be amended by deleting the word “fairer” and substituting —
fair

This is a fair offer. It is a fair offer in the context of the wage negotiations that state governments around Australia find themselves in. I will present one simple example.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Members opposite might want to turn their ears on for one second. This relates to Queensland and the miscellaneous workers’ union complaining about its ongoing negotiations with the state government for wages in the health sector. An article on the website of *The Courier-Mail* on 13 September states —

The LHMU and the Public Sector Union have been negotiating a wage increase since August after the State Government —

That is the Labor state government, the great defender of the workers —

offered 2.5 per cent a year, the standard offer for all public servants since the start of this year.

In this example, we have the great defender of the workers offering a 2.5 per cent increase. This government’s offer is a fair offer. I will tell members why it is a fair offer. When we set up the government wages policy, it was designed —

Mr E.S. Ripper: When you set it up.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It was a very good policy. It was designed to do two things: to protect the purchasing power of employees by providing guaranteed wage increases at the consumer price index at a time when people were having wage increases the length and breadth of this nation, and to give the capacity for people to negotiate productivity-based increases in real wages up to a cap set by the wage price index. It is a fair, clear and concise policy. It has been tested. We have had reason to have dispute with Mr Kelly and his union previously in relation to school cleaners and education assistants in schools. That was not tested by the government. We negotiated at all times in a fair way and in good faith with the union. It was decided by the independent umpire, which came out with an outcome that was very similar to the government offer; in other words, the independent umpire, the Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission, assessed our offer and the claim of the union and made a determination that was largely in line with the government wages policy. It was a fair outcome because this is a fair wages policy.

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Speaker; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Eric Ripper; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Marmion; Dr Kim Hames; Acting Speaker;
Mr David Templeman; Mr Troy Buswell

I want to reflect on the former government's wages policy, which, Leader of the Opposition, was not 4.5 per cent per annum. I challenge him to table any offer he made that was 4.5 per cent per annum. His offer was, "We will neither lead nor lag in terms of wage negotiations." Do members know what that perfectly clear policy meant? It meant that the unions with the most pull got the best outcomes. The former Labor government's policy was to neither lead nor lag, but if someone had a hotline to a heavyweight, he was in. That is exactly what happened under the former government. I reject categorically, as does the government, that this is not a fair policy. It is a fair policy by interstate comparison. It is a fair policy because it protects the purchasing power of people and it gives them the opportunity to negotiate a higher outcome through productivity-based negotiations. The test for the opposition will be whether it lines up with the union, arm in arm with Dave Kelly, just as the Leader of the Opposition did in that disgraceful incident at Malibu School, when members of the union denied their labour to those incredibly disadvantaged students who suffered because of members opposite. The Leader of the Opposition was arm in arm with Dave Kelly! Will the Leader of the Opposition march around the wards of the hospitals of this state when they do the same thing this time? I bet he will because he has never had the courage to stand up to them for one instant. This is a fair policy. It has been judged by the independent umpire in this state, and this government is committed to it. The opposition can come in here all bluff and bluster and talk about 4.5 per cent; it has never ever offered it before and it is not going to happen now.

Amendment (deletion of word) put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (27)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr M.J. Cowper	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr C.C. Porter
Mr F.A. Alban	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr V.A. Catania	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Ms A.R. Mitchell	Mr J.E. McGrath (<i>Teller</i>)
Dr E. Constable	Mr A.P. Jacob	Dr M.D. Nahan	

Noes (24)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Ms A.S. Carles	Mr F.M. Logan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.H. Cook	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr P.B. Watson
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr M.P. Murray	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr A.P. O'Gorman	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr P. Papalia	Mr T.G. Stephens	Mr D.A. Templeman (<i>Teller</i>)

Pairs

Mr I.M. Britza	Mr M. McGowan
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr A.J. Waddell

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of word) put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (27)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr M.J. Cowper	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Mr C.C. Porter
Mr F.A. Alban	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr A.J. Simpson
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr T.K. Waldron
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Pairs

Mr I.M. Britza	Mr M. McGowan
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr A.J. Waddell

Amendment thus passed.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY - Tuesday, 14 September 2010]

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Speaker; Mr Roger Cook; Mr Eric Ripper; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Bill Marmion; Dr Kim Hames; Acting Speaker;
Mr David Templeman; Mr Troy Buswell

Motion, as Amended

Question put and passed.