



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2023

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 29 March 2023



# Legislative Assembly

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**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** took the chair at 12 noon, acknowledged country and read prayers.

## BREAST ASSESSMENT CLINIC — PEEL HEALTH CAMPUS

### *Petition*

**MRS L.A. MUNDAY (Dawesville)** [12.01 pm]: On behalf of the member for Mandurah, the member for Murray–Wellington and me, I present a petition that has been certified as conforming with the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly. It has 801 signatures. The petition says —

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled.

We, the undersigned, say: —

With respect to a breast assessment, you would usually have a breast examination followed by one, more or all of the following tests: Mammogram, ultrasound scan, core biopsy and fine needle aspiration, with the possibility of other tests deemed by the Assessment team.

Having a Breast Assessment Clinic in the Peel region would allow potential breast cancer patients to receive the full assessment in the one clinic and in their local area with the support of their families. Therefore, reducing the emotional, physical, mental and financial impact of their cancer diagnosis.

Now we ask the Legislative Assembly to recommend and support the allocation of Government funding for the provision of a Breast Assessment Clinic at Peel Health Campus.

[See petition 39.]

## PAPERS TABLED

Papers were tabled and ordered to lie upon the table of the house.

## TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE — EXMOUTH

### *Statement by Minister for Tourism*

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Tourism)** [12.02 pm]: It is my pleasure to update the house on the progress of preparations for the total solar eclipse, as we recently passed the one-month-to-go mark. Last week, the Minister for Regional Development, along with the member for Mining and Pastoral Region in the other place, visited Exmouth to unveil the new Town Beach foreshore preparation works. This key legacy item was partly funded by the Labor government's \$22 million commitment to prepare the region and ensure that all visitors can experience a safe and enjoyable event, with upgrades and improvements to roads, marine infrastructure, telecommunication networks and local facilities. Completed in two phases with support from the McGowan government and the Shire of Exmouth, the development boasts several new features, including shade structures, boardwalk decking, fencing, irrigation, lawns, a drinking fountain and waste facilities. The contribution will provide a lasting legacy for the region, which is one of our fastest growing and most popular tourist destinations, and features in our successful global tourism campaign Walking on a Dream.

The funding included a \$7.8 million commitment to traffic management and infrastructure upgrades, including \$1.9 million to fund rest area upgrades on the Minilya–Exmouth Road; an investment of \$5.4 million into telecommunications, including new mobile base stations and the upgrade of base stations across the region; and a commitment of over \$3.9 million for a new temporary six million-litre water tank to be erected at the Welch Street camp site in Exmouth, along with the installation of permanent water infrastructure. Financial assistance agreements between the McGowan government and the Shires of Exmouth, Carnarvon and Ashburton have also assisted readiness, whilst 40 businesses successfully applied for the total solar eclipse round of the local capability fund, totalling more than \$837 000, which will further help local businesses prepare for the event.

This event is a rare opportunity to showcase WA to the world as a premium tourism and astrotourism destination. We are working hard to help make it a safe and enjoyable experience for everyone. I encourage everyone to plan ahead to ensure that they can make the most of their trip to our state's north west, and to visit the Ningaloo Eclipse website for more information.

## PREMIER'S SCIENCE AWARDS

### *Statement by Minister for Science*

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Science)** [12.05 pm]: Today I stand to inform the house that applications recently opened for the 2023 Premier's Science Awards and WA Science Hall of Fame. Now in their

twenty-second year, the awards recognise outstanding achievements in scientific research, study and engagement by Western Australians, and cover all fields of science, including natural, medical, applied and technological science, engineering and mathematics. The awards have shone a spotlight on WA's finest STEM talent since 2002, highlighting work that is helping to improve the lives of people in not only Western Australia, but also communities around the world. STEM skills underpin our state's ability to address local and global issues across all industries, including health and medical life sciences, defence, new energies and space.

The 2023 award categories include Scientist of the Year, Mid-Career Scientist of the Year, Early Career Scientist of the Year, Student Scientist of the Year, Aboriginal STEM Student of the Year and Science Engagement Initiative of the Year. The winners will be announced at an awards ceremony in September, with category winners sharing \$100 000 in prize money.

Former winners include a range of notable Western Australians, including the winner of the prestigious 2022 Scientist of the Year, Australian Laureate Fellow and John Curtin Distinguished Professor Kliti Grice, an internationally renowned organic geochemist known for her work in identifying geological and environmental causes for mass extinction events that shaped life on Earth. Joint winner of the 2022 ExxonMobil Student Scientist of the Year Dr Kat Ross was recognised for her research on supermassive black holes and her role in encouraging more young women into STEM fields as founder of the national campaign #IncludeHer. The WA Science Hall of Fame inductee will also be announced at the ceremony.

The Premier's Science Awards are a testament to the high calibre of talent and ingenuity in our science community and represent a chance to celebrate WA's amazing scientific achievements and capabilities. It is critical that we continue to build on this capability and competitive advantage as we look to address environmental and social challenges and grow a strong and diverse STEM skills pipeline for Western Australia. I encourage members across our STEM community to apply for an award or submit a nomination to the WA Science Hall of Fame. Applications close Thursday, 27 April.

## VOLUNTEERS

*Statement by Minister for Sport and Recreation*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Sport and Recreation)** [12.08 pm]: As the weather cools down, our winter sports season heats up! Our volunteers are in the engine room, ensuring participants are able to take to the fields and courts across the state. Our volunteers in sport and recreation cover all aspects of making play happen. Whether it is coaching, officiating, scoring, managing a team, working in the canteen or treating injuries, we can count on volunteers to be there and make it happen.

Western Australians volunteer more than 315 million hours every year. For every dollar invested by the state's volunteer organisations, \$4.50 is returned in benefits to the community. The benefits of volunteering for sport and recreation and the broader community are immense, and include providing skills development, participation, inclusion and employment; driving economic growth; and, importantly, creating a personal sense of achievement and wellbeing.

We all know that COVID impacted the number of people volunteering and, as a result, how people volunteer is changing. Volunteering, including in sport and recreation, is no longer all about having a long-term commitment. Got a passion for numbers? You may be able to assist with capturing data and providing player statistics or supporting the committee's treasurer. Is social media your thing? If it is, work with your club's committee to expand the reach of your club. Are you good at marketing? If you are, join the club's social committee to support events and opportunities. If you have a special skill set or an idea that could help a club or organisation to grow or expand, reach out and see how you can support the growth of sport and recreation opportunities in Western Australia.

I recognise and thank all those people who have volunteered in our summer sports and those already involved in our winter sports and preparation. From frosty mornings to cool evenings, people's support of sport and recreation is valued. Our local community sports clubs could not exist without them. Our volunteers who are waving the flags, crunching the numbers, washing the uniforms, serving in the canteen, setting up or packing down equipment, keeping the score, blowing the siren and supporting our clubs are all an essential part of winter sports. I thank them and encourage people who want to be involved to volunteer for their local sporting organisation.

**Dr A.D. Buti:** You could be the water boy!

**Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN:** Goal umpire for the AFL in Mandurah—do not worry about that!

## INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

*Statement by Minister for Culture and the Arts*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Culture and the Arts)** [12.10 pm]: This is a very important statement. On 13 December last year, the International Decade of Indigenous Languages from 2022 to 2032 was launched in Paris at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, known as UNESCO. The purpose of the decade is to serve as a major focus for nations around the world to stem the loss of Indigenous languages, reverse this trend and ensure that Indigenous languages flourish.

A number of Western Australians were present at the event, including Noongar Wardandi elders Vivian Brockman Webb and Mitchella Hutchins, along with creative collaborators Martine Perret and Roly Skender. They were supported by the WA government through the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries to present an audiovisual artwork titled *Wannang Biridge*. “Wannang biridge” means light of the peppermint tree. I have seen the installation. The artwork was presented in the Wardandi language of the Margaret River region and combined portraiture of Wardandi elders with images of country. Vivian and Mitchella also attended the Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages meeting and outlined their vision, experience and recommendations for language revival. In addition, the launch was attended by Denise Smith-Ali, senior linguist from the Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation in Perth and member of the directions group at the commonwealth Office for the Arts on the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Denise was part of the official Australian delegation selected to attend the launch.

Through the Closing the Gap framework, the WA government has just started to create the foundations that will address this significant issue in Western Australia. It will involve the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries working with the Departments of Education and Justice, and other key language sector stakeholders to develop a coherent strategy designed to support language revitalisation and revival. The Western Australian government is also contributing to the development of a national framework of support through the Closing the Gap languages policy partnership. It is a very important endeavour by the government and those involved.

### INTERNATIONAL HOCKEY

#### *Statement by Minister for Sport and Recreation*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for Sport and Recreation)** [12.13 pm]: It is hockey now. It gives me great pleasure to welcome back international hockey to Western Australia for the first time since June 2021. Over the past week, Western Australia welcomed the women’s national hockey team from the People’s Republic of China.

The team played a three-game series against our own magnificent Hockeyroos. As part of the Chinese team’s visit, the state government conducted a welcome function at Fraser’s in Kings Park, which I was very pleased to attend. The first match of the series was held in Bunbury last Thursday and resulted in a 0–0 draw. It was the first hockey international match played in the south west region since the Hockeyroos played Great Britain in February 2016. The night-time match was held at the Bunbury and Districts Hockey Stadium following recent upgrades to lighting at the venue thanks to \$260 000 provided by the government through the Club Night Lights Program. Games 2 and 3 were held at the Perth Hockey Stadium at Curtin University. Both fixtures served up some thrilling hockey. However, China prevailed in both matches, winning 2–0 and 4–3. They were tense games. The three-match series has served as a valuable, high-level competition for both teams leading into the International Hockey Federation Pro League season. The series adds to an already packed 2023 schedule for our Hockeyroos, with the highest priority being August’s Oceania Cup against New Zealand, which doubles as a qualifier for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

The success of the series again demonstrates WA’s ability to host the national high-performance hockey program. As members will recall, in December Hockey Australia announced that Western Australia’s bid to retain the high-performance program in Perth beyond 2024 was successful. It was a great day for sport in WA. The government is now working closely with Hockey Australia and Hockey WA to finalise the agreement to enable construction of a purpose-built hockey centre at Curtin. The centre will include seating for up to 10 000 spectators and the latest broadcasting capabilities. The bid includes funding for athlete wellbeing, the development of stronger connections to Asia, and support for travel associated with the program. Benefits of the investment are already being shown, with Hockey WA recently hosting the under-21 Malaysian men’s team and plans to host the Singaporean team later this month. I congratulate Hockey WA on delivering last week’s wonderful exhibition of top international hockey right on our doorstep and I am very excited by what the future will bring for hockey in Western Australia.

### KIMBERLEY FLOODS — LEGAL ASSISTANCE RESPONSE

#### *Statement by Attorney General*

**MR J.R. QUIGLEY (Butler — Attorney General)** [12.16 pm]: I would like to take the opportunity to inform the house about the legal assistance response to the unprecedented flooding events in the Kimberley as a result of ex-tropical cyclone Ellie at the beginning of this year. The Department of Justice has an ongoing role in coordinating the legal assistance response to the expected legal needs arising from the damage and displacement caused by the floods, in relation to both new matters and the increased complexity of legal issues already on foot. New matters include legal issues in relation to tenancy, welfare rights, obtaining identity documents, and consumer credit issues such as scams targeting people affected by the floods. Ongoing legal issues include issues relating to family and domestic violence, and care and protection. It is anticipated that the affected communities will feel the effects of these legal needs not only now, but also in coming years.

The Department of Justice is grateful to be working closely with highly respected local legal assistance service providers and specialist legal assistance service providers with expertise in the types of legal issues arising as a result

of the floods. The swift and professional response by these service providers, in addition to their usual work, has been particularly commendable. Additionally, within the department, the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the Fines Enforcement Registry have implemented measures that are responsive to the loss and displacement experienced by people affected by the floods. The local court has also implemented flexible measures that take into account the challenges in progressing court matters in the West Kimberley at this time.

Legal assistance to people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage often intersects with social support needs. In recognition of this, the department is also liaising with other relevant government agencies, including the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Communities and the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety, to ensure that the legal assistance response is integrated with the broader state-coordinated response.

### **DEFENCE INDUSTRY VETERANS EMPLOYMENT SCHEME**

#### *Statement by Minister for Veterans Issues*

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Veterans Issues)** [12.19 pm]: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to share the success of the defence industry veterans employment scheme, or DIVES as it is more commonly known. The McGowan government allocated \$400 000 to DIVES over four years as part of the broader \$18 million defence skills ready program, designed to build a capable defence industry workforce. DIVES provides eligible Western Australian veterans with a scholarship of up to \$5 000 to cover costs involved in accessing higher education that is relevant to defence. It allows ex-service personnel the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications required to work within the defence industry. Over the four years of the program, 80 scholarships will be given out. All 20 scholarships for the current financial year have been allocated, demonstrating the demand for this initiative. Assisting Australian Defence Force personnel to apply the skills and expertise they gained during their service to Western Australia's defence industry is of great benefit to veterans, industry and the Western Australian economy.

The importance of this program is evident in the experiences of those who have accessed the scholarship. I would like to take this opportunity to highlight just a couple of examples of WA veterans who have spoken strongly in support of the DIVES scholarship. Sam served in the Royal Australian Navy as a clearance diver for approximately 15 years and is therefore, by definition, a good man! Upon being medically discharged, Sam became concerned that he did not have a skill set sufficient to gain employment. He made the decision to upskill using his own finances and jumped at the opportunity to apply for the DIVES scholarship. The scholarship allowed him to obtain a role in the defence industry—a role he retains today. Jess had served in the Australian Army for over 12 years as a full-time member and a reservist. She has two young children and places a strong emphasis on achieving a balance between her work and family life. The DIVES scholarship allowed Jess to obtain qualifications that assisted her in landing a health and safety position in the defence industry. She is now able to work part-time in the industry that she loves.

I would like to congratulate all the DIVES scholarship recipients and wish them all the best in their study, work and jobseeking. A special thankyou to Sam, Jess, Gilbert, Jake, Nathan, Kim, Brett and Adam for sharing their experiences and positive feedback with the DIVES scholarship. Can I finish by extending a big thankyou to the team at South Metropolitan TAFE, in particular Mel, Rod, Nihar and Martin, for their hard work in delivering this program.

### **ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE COUNCIL**

#### *Statement by Minister for Aboriginal Affairs*

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Aboriginal Affairs)** [12.22 pm]: I rise today to advise the house that last week I announced the opening of a process to seek further members for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Council. Up to four new members will be appointed to join the inaugural council in overseeing the new Aboriginal cultural heritage laws. The council was created in September 2022 with seven initial members, including co-chairs Irene Stainton and Dr Mark Bin Bakar. The act allows for a total of 11 members on the council, with majority Aboriginal representation. New members are now sought to bring the council up to its full number. All council members must demonstrate knowledge or experience of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Those with additional experience in engineering, land management and natural resource management are particularly encouraged to nominate.

The council will oversee operation of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021 once it comes into full effect on 1 July 2023. To date, the council has delivered the final phase of the co-design process, providing the guidelines that implement key elements of the legislation. The functions of the council under the new legislative framework include the following. It will promote the role of Aboriginal people as the right people to speak for their country and determine activities that may cause harm to their cultural heritage; provide advice to the state government and me as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs; designate local Aboriginal cultural heritage services, known as LACHS; set standards to identify, protect and manage Aboriginal cultural heritage; facilitate negotiations between proponents and Aboriginal parties when agreement cannot be reached; and promote public awareness, understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Western Australia.

Nominations are now open and will be taken until 30 April 2023. New members will be appointed and inducted into the council in July 2023. Eligible people, willing to take an active role in enabling the new legislation and shaping the future of Aboriginal cultural heritage in Western Australia should be encouraged to apply.

**KATANNING HARMONY FESTIVAL***Statement by Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests*

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests)** [12.24 pm]: I am pleased to update the house on my recent visit to the Shire of Katanning. My colleague Hon Shelley Payne, MLC, and I were lucky enough to be invited to attend the Katanning Harmony Festival, which is organised each year by the shire. We were joined by Katanning's local member, the member for Roe, who is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. This two-day festival is dedicated to celebrating the cultural diversity of Katanning. Katanning is the most culturally and linguistically diverse regional centre in Western Australia, boasting among its residents people originating from more than 45 countries. The theme for the 2023 festival was "Communities Reconnecting". This meant the festival had a focus on shared stories and the importance of connection when building a strong community—something that Katanning has clearly achieved. As one of the older regional towns in Western Australia, Katanning has been made stronger by the many migrants from diverse cultural backgrounds and religions who have made this town their home. Their histories need to be recognised and acknowledged, and will become the shared stories of future generations.

The festival was a great reminder for me of what can be achieved when communities come together to create an inclusive and harmonious society. Although I enjoyed all the entertainment and activities on offer, I must admit one of my favourite moments may have been shooting a three-pointer in the street basketball corner. Members can view this by going to my social media outlets. It is well worth a view!

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** I didn't see it!

**Dr A.D. BUTI:** Just go online. There are some kids in Katanning now who will never underestimate a politician again.

The festival was supported by the McGowan Labor government with \$30 000 from Lotterywest and \$5 000 from the Office of Multicultural Interests. The festival was also the recipient of state government funding through the regional events scheme. This scheme was established to support small and new events across regional Western Australia. As this funding is designated to reinvigorate travel into the regions, I was pleased to see the turnout of people at the festival this weekend, many of whom were visitors to the town. It is important that we continue to find ways to invest in, engage with and celebrate our cultural diversity. I commend the shire president, Liz Guidera, and the shire employees, the community leaders and everyone involved in the organisation and delivery of this festival.

**SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD WEEK***Statement by Minister for Fisheries*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries)** [12.26 pm]: For lovers of seafood, this week is Sustainable Seafood Week, which is an opportunity to raise awareness of and celebrate Western Australian sustainable seafood, the seafood industry and the restaurants and chefs that champion our wonderful Western Australian produce. Western Australia has a strong track record with sustainable fisheries, with world-class science informing effective fisheries management. On that, I would like to acknowledge the excellent work done by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. To benchmark our fisheries against best practice and assist industry development, the WA government has supported our fisheries to be independently assessed against the Marine Stewardship Council sustainability standard, which is widely recognised as the gold standard for sustainable fishing practices.

The Western Australian rock lobster fishery was the world's first to enter the MSC process and is now the longest running fishery in this program. We also have the world's first joint commercial and recreational fishery in the MSC, recognising the importance of blue swimmer crabs in the Peel–Harvey estuary. To date, 90 per cent of the value of the WA commercial fishing sector is certified under the MSC as sustainable. Across all WA fisheries, the most recent state of the fisheries report shows that 98 per cent of our fish stocks were assessed as not being at risk through exploitation. Aquaculture is also an important part of the sustainable seafood landscape, which is a growing industry full of opportunity in Western Australia.

Sustainable seafood is not just about the commercial industry. Our sustainable fisheries also support a wealth of recreational opportunities, providing the ability for people to enjoy the outdoors and get great fresh fish from our oceans, rivers and estuaries. The sector is an incredibly important drawcard for our regional areas, supporting tourism, local businesses, and jobs. Throughout Sustainable Seafood Week, I encourage people to look at buying some of the great sustainable seafood and at the recreational fishing opportunities on offer. I would also like to reiterate my appreciation for the hard work and dedication of our commercial fishers and all those in the seafood industry who contribute so much to the Western Australian economy.

**MISUSE OF DRUGS AMENDMENT BILL 2023***Introduction and First Reading*

Bill introduced, on motion by **Mr P. Papalia (Minister for Police)**, and read a first time.

Explanatory memorandum presented by the minister.

*Second Reading*

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police)** [12.29 pm]: I move —

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2023 will introduce amendments to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981 to create a border search area, or BSA, scheme. The intent of the BSA scheme is to detect, deter and reduce the importation of illicit drugs into Western Australia. Serious and organised crime groups are overwhelmingly responsible for orchestrating the supply of illicit drugs such as methylamphetamine into Western Australia. These groups rely on supply chains that incorporate transport networks capable of importing and dispersing large volumes of drugs. Disrupting these supply chains and transport networks is an important step in disrupting the activities of serious and organised crime groups as well as disrupting the overall availability and subsequent consumption of illicit drugs in Western Australia.

National wastewater analysis results show that methylamphetamine is the most consumed illicit drug in Australia, and its consumption continues to increase. Western Australia has commonly been considered a jurisdiction with high levels of methylamphetamine use, with wastewater testing often ranking WA as having the highest level of methylamphetamine consumption in Australia. Western Australia's consumption of methylamphetamine changed significantly in 2020. This coincided with the introduction of Western Australia's hard border closures as part of the travel restrictions that were put in place in response to COVID-19. During this time, WA saw a substantial decrease in methylamphetamine consumption. When comparing the pre-border closure consumption rates with the consumption rates during the border closures, wastewater analysis indicated a decrease of 51 per cent in the Perth metropolitan area, 73 per cent in Albany and 65 per cent in Geraldton. Unfortunately, once the border restrictions eased, the analysis results began to indicate an increase in the availability of methylamphetamine once again. WA has now returned to being one of the jurisdictions nationally with the highest estimated consumption of methylamphetamine. The Western Australia Police Force attributes the main contributing factors to the reduction in methylamphetamine in 2020 to the border closures and associated police presence at border check points, paired with the perception of police officers being able to conduct searches at border checkpoints.

The border search area scheme outlined in the bill is founded on what was learnt and achieved during the hard border closures, and will provide police with a set of tools to target the importation of illicit drugs into WA and the serious and organised crime groups that orchestrate these activities. The powers that will be introduced by the scheme are based upon, and designed to complement, the powers of the vehicle search authorisation scheme under part 4A of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981. Part 4A of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1981 commenced in 2017 and provides powers for police to disrupt the illicit drug market through setting up temporary vehicle search locations via vehicle search authorisations. The intent of these powers was to target the transit of illicit drugs through creating additional powers for police to search vehicles. Under the vehicle search authorisation scheme, a senior police officer can authorise police officers to conduct vehicle searches in a designated area. Once the area has been authorised, police can stop and detain any vehicle in that area and conduct searches, including preliminary drug-detection tests on the vehicle and any persons or property in or on the vehicle. Although the WA Police Force has had some significant cash and drug-related seizures as a result of the vehicle search authorisations, these powers are targeted at road transit within WA and cannot be effectively used to disrupt border-related importation activities.

There are several aspects of the vehicle search authorisation scheme that make it unsuitable for targeting the importation of illicit drugs into WA through our borders. Vehicle search authorisations can be issued only after first establishing that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a specific area is being, or is likely to be, used for the transport of a prohibited drug, plant or controlled precursor. A vehicle search authorisation only has effect for a period not exceeding 14 days and can be renewed only by a senior police officer for a further 14 days if the reasonable suspicion threshold is again satisfied. Vehicle search authorisations cannot be issued for an area within the metropolitan area. Only three authorisations can be in force at any one time. The scheme is vehicle focused, and preliminary drug-detection tests can be done only on persons who are, or recently were, in vehicles. These provisions within the vehicle search authorisation scheme do not allow for the WA Police Force to actively police importations when the drugs are being moved by a person who is not in a vehicle and when the importation is taking place within the Perth metropolitan region, such as Perth Airport.

The scheme will also prevent police from conducting deterrence or disruption activities as they are unable to have a presence at numerous entry or egress points at once. Instead, only three vehicle search authorisations can be in place at one time, and locations can be authorised only if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the area is being, or is likely to be, used for the transport of a prohibited drug, plant or controlled precursor.

The BSA scheme draws from the vehicle search authorisation scheme but nuances the powers and processes to respond to the unique requirements of policing drug importation activities at entry and egress locations across the state. Broadly, the scheme is centred on identifying the key locations of entry and egress into Western Australia used to import and export illicit drugs, and will provide police with additional powers at these locations to detect drug-related activity.



The bill will provide for the BSA scheme through five key components. The first component of the scheme is the identification of border search areas or BSAs. BSAs are the key locations of entry and egress into Western Australia that have been identified as potential drug importation or exportation locations. The bill will provide for 22 BSA locations that will be listed in a new schedule to the act, schedule 6A. The 22 BSAs will comprise all major road, rail, air and sea entry points into WA as well as other air and sea ports that have been identified by the WA Police Force as potentially being used for the movement of illicit drugs. Division 1 of schedule 6A provides a description of the boundary lines of each BSA, using longitude and latitude coordinates. To ensure that the boundaries of each BSA are as accessible as possible, division 2 provides an image of each BSA using an aerial photograph overlaid with an illustration of the boundary lines. These images have been included for guidance purposes only and division 1 should be relied upon for the exact detail on the boundary lines. The bill provides a comprehensive process for amending schedule 6A to either declare a new BSA or to modify an existing BSA. The process requires the Minister for Police to consult other relevant ministers and seek approval from the Attorney General, as well as to be satisfied of various criteria, including that the BSA is limited in size to an area that does not exceed five square kilometres. Once these requirements have been met, any amendments to schedule 6A will then be able to be made by the Governor by Order-in-Council and published in the *Government Gazette* in accordance with the process for amending other schedules under the act.

The second component of the scheme is the process for activating a BSA. The additional powers that will be introduced by the BSA scheme can be used only when a BSA is activated. BSAs will be dormant unless the BSA is specifically activated by a written authorisation from a senior officer with a rank of inspector or above. If the officer who issues the BSA authorisation is of the rank of inspector, the BSA authorisation must then be further ratified in writing by a police officer of, or above, the rank of superintendent. If this does not happen, the BSA authorisation ceases to have effect. A BSA authorisation can be in effect for a maximum of 28 days.

The third component of the BSA scheme is the powers that will be available to police within an activated BSA. Once a BSA is activated, police officers will be provided with two key powers. The first is the power to conduct preliminary drug-detection tests on persons, and the second is to conduct vehicle searches. A preliminary drug-detection test is a non-invasive test involving either placing a drug-detection dog in the vicinity of a person or property or using a drug-detection device such as a wand by passing it over the person or property. Preliminary drug-detection tests are used to detect the presence of prohibited drugs, prohibited plants and controlled precursors. Police will be able to conduct these tests on persons who are in public places within an activated BSA. Police will also have a power to detain a person for a reasonable period in order to do the test.

A vehicle search is when police can enter and search a vehicle or any part of a vehicle and includes conducting a preliminary drug-detection test on the vehicle. Under the border search area scheme, police will be able to conduct searches on any vehicle that is in a public place within an activated BSA. In order to conduct the search, police will be able to utilise a range of powers, including detaining the vehicle for a reasonable time and moving the vehicle to a more suitable place. There will also be powers for police to require the driver or any passenger to do certain things to support the search, such as stopping the vehicle; opening any part of the vehicle, such as the boot; and requiring them to remain in the vehicle. Any person who does not comply with these instructions will be committing a simple offence under the bill. This offence will have a penalty of a fine of up to \$3 000 or a term of imprisonment of up to three years, or both.

The bill will also provide that any person who hinders a police officer conducting a preliminary drug-detection test or a vehicle search will be committing a simple offence under section 29 of the act. This offence will have a penalty of a fine of up to \$3 000 or a term of imprisonment of up to three years, or both.

If a preliminary drug-detection test conducted on either a person or a vehicle indicates the presence of a prohibited drug, prohibited plant or controlled precursor, the bill specifies that this will be considered reasonable grounds to suspect that the person involved is in possession of a thing suspected of being used in the commission of an offence. This will then enable police to utilise powers under section 23 of the act whereby police will be able to stop, detain and search the person along with any baggage, package, vehicle or other thing in their possession and use such force as is reasonably necessary.

Several limitations are placed on the BSA powers. These will function as safeguards to ensure that the powers are targeted at those involved in the illicit drug trade and include that the powers can be used only in a public place, and that the powers cannot be exercised on persons engaging in certain exempt activities such as political demonstrations, religious or cultural activities and medical emergencies. A regulation-making power has also been included in the bill to allow for further exemptions to be listed should they be identified as necessary.

Comprehensive reporting and oversight provisions are included in the BSA scheme as the fourth key component. The scheme will require the Commissioner of Police to provide a report to the Corruption and Crime Commission every six months. The bill prescribes a comprehensive list of what must be included in the report. This includes data on the number of times that preliminary drug-detection tests and vehicle searches were carried out in each BSA, and any seizures, arrests and prosecutions arising from the utilisation of powers. The Corruption and Crime Commission must then provide an annual report to the Minister for Police on the activities undertaken by police under the BSA scheme. This report must be tabled in Parliament.

The final component of the BSA scheme is the two key mechanisms that have been included in the bill to ensure the legislation is effective and necessary. The first is a statutory review mechanism. Three years after the reforms commence, the BSA scheme will be subject to a review to scrutinise the operation and effectiveness of the scheme. This Minister for Police will be required to table the final review report in Parliament. The second mechanism is a sunset provision. The bill will include a sunset clause that will take effect five years after the scheme commences. The sunset clause will immediately cease the BSA scheme by removing the changes made by this bill from the act, unless Parliament takes active steps to extend the BSA scheme. This has been included in the bill to ensure that the BSA scheme and the powers it provides to police officers will be in force only while they are effective and necessary.

The provisions contained within the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2023 are aimed at providing the Western Australia Police Force with effective tools for disrupting the supply of illicit drugs, such as methylamphetamine, into Western Australia. It is intended that these reforms will enhance community safety and contribute to dismantling the serious and organised crime groups that conduct their business in our state.

This bill complements a broader suite of recent legislative reforms targeted at disrupting serious and organised crime, including the Criminal Law (Unlawful Consorting and Prohibited Insignia) Act 2021, which is targeted at disrupting outlaw motorcycle gangs, and the Firearms Amendment Act 2022, which provides police with the tools to prohibit dangerous people, such as members of serious and organised crime groups, from being in possession of a firearm.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Ms M. Beard**.

### **WORKERS COMPENSATION AND INJURY MANAGEMENT BILL 2023 WORKERS COMPENSATION AND INJURY MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2023**

*Second Reading — Cognate Debate*

Resumed from 28 March.

**MR T.J. HEALY (Southern River — Parliamentary Secretary)** [12.45 pm]: I rise today to speak to the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 and the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Amendment Bill 2023. First I note that I welcome the introduction of the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2023 by the Minister for Police. I concur with all his statements.

I represent about 50 000 constituents in Southern River, of which there are about 30 000 enrolled electors, plus the people who are not enrolled—they are not citizens—but who are workers in this state. They grow this state. They are business owners, workers, employees and employers. In all industries large and small, be it small business or the private or public sector, I want to thank all the employers and employees in my community who do the right thing and who look after each other. I thank those employers who ensure that they do everything that is legally required to keep their workplace safe, and, by doing so, send a message of value to their workers by ensuring that every worker gets to go home to their family.

I have workers who work in residential areas of my community—Southern River, Huntingdale, Gosnells and Canning Vale. I have workers who work in light and heavy industrial areas, drive-in drive-out workers who work in regional communities, and fly-in fly-out workers. I have a number of workers whose families live within my community and who depend on very effective workers compensation legislation, which is what is before the chamber today.

It is timely that the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981—that was a very good year for members of the Legislative Assembly from Southern River; if I have grey hair, so does the bill!—be revised now. This bill will provide a framework for every aspect of the workers compensation and injury management scheme in Western Australia. It will include workers and employers who are covered by the scheme, compensation, information about the claims process, injury management, dispute resolution, mandatory insurance, scheme administration, licensing approval and regulation. I understand that a number of provisions can be traced back well before the 1981 act. That has been a longstanding piece of legislation for a number of businesses, bureaucrats and legislative persons. I understand that the rigidity of the act means that in some cases, there has not been the flexibility to respond to certain industrial, technological and other developments as we have moved into a more modern era.

As I said, the 1981 act has served the state well. I have mentioned some of the workers and the businesses in my community. I would like to give a shout-out to one of them that looks after their workers very, very well—C.Y. O'Connor Village Pub. As members know, the tavern burnt down two years ago, but the rebuilt facilities and Tilly's Garden are once again open and started trading yesterday. I would like to give a shout-out to the Dawkins family and all those people involved with the C.Y. O'Connor Village Pub. It is a business that looks after its employees and invests in the hospitality trade. It looks after not only its chefs and waitstaff, but also those who work in the cattle industry. Those people work very hard. I would like to give them a special shout-out and welcome everyone in our community back to the rebuilt and reopened C.Y. O'Connor pub, as I am sure members will appreciate.

As I am sure everyone in this chamber understands, the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 will modernise Western Australia's workers compensation laws while preserving certain fundamental elements of the scheme. It is the culmination of an extensive review and consultation process dating back to WorkCover Western Australia's legislative review in 2009, which recommended a redrafting of the act, and the 171 recommendations contained in WorkCover WA's 2014 *Review of the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981: Final report*. The bill will provide further clarity and certainty for businesses, employers and employees. Again, I thank all those people who do the right thing and look after all the businesses in their communities.

I would like to speak briefly on something that members and I have raised many times in this chamber. A number of workers have just completed the works on a number of bus stops within my community. There were a number of contractors. My understanding is that, hopefully, no workers compensation claims will come from those works, but I thank those workers. I again say thank you to the council staff who received the funding for our bus stop upgrades. Eight of them have now been finished. I have said in this chamber many times before that I think bus stops should be more than just an orange pole; they should have seating and shelter. We have completed those works. It is tricky, risky work out in the community, in the heat and the weather. I say thank you to all those workers, who are covered and protected by workers compensation legislation. I thank them for all their work. I am always very proud to deliver on my promises in the community, and it is always important that those workers are protected when they do this work.

I refer to the delivery of election commitments. This piece of legislation will deliver on another election commitment that was promised by the McGowan government, and I commend the minister for ensuring that we deliver on our election promises. In the lead-up to the 2021 state election, the McGowan government reiterated its commitment to modernise Western Australia's workers compensation laws based on that final report of WorkCover WA. Again, I commend the Western Australian government. We have now been in government for six years. From my time previous to coming to this chamber, I have not known a government that has delivered so substantially on its promises made to its communities. Again, this is just one more piece of that plan to deliver on our election commitments.

For those who are playing at home, one of the changes that will deliver on that election commitment is that this bill will increase the cap on medical and health expenses compensation. The current act has a monetary limit for compensable medical and health expenses set at 30 per cent of the maximum weekly compensation limit—currently in the \$73 000 realm. I have a former student who is now one of my constituents who was affected by this. They had sustained an injury, and the pool of funds accessible to them was not enough to cover their health and rehabilitation requirements. I commend a number of complex parts of this bill. I link this back to my community, in which I see humans—real people—affected when for bureaucratic or budgetary reasons, they cannot access certain pools of funds or the things that will allow them to return to their families or to work; they cannot return to having a fully functioning role within their civilian, work and family life. The changes that will come under this legislation will ensure that the amount of money available will be adequate to cover the medical expenses of most workers, because, unfortunately, that entitlement can be quickly exhausted for seriously injured workers. Those expenses include hospital stays, and, as I said, multiple and complex requirements such as rehabilitation and psychological or physical therapy. There are all sorts of different types of requirements. This bill will raise the limit for compensable medical and health expenses from 30 per cent to 60 per cent of the prescribed maximum limit, which will result in an increase of the capped amount from in the realm of \$73 000 to \$146 000. Again, I commend the minister for that.

Another election commitment that this bill will deliver will be that injured workers who cannot work because of their injury will receive an appropriate level of support for loss of income for a longer period. This will be achieved by extending the point at which income compensation steps down by 15 per cent, and the bill will also extend a step-down point item from 13 to 26 weeks.

Speaking of step-down points, members will also be aware that we are about to begin works on the removal of speed bumps on Harpenden Street. That will employ a number of people in my community. Again, I hope that the workers who work on this will not have any injuries or incidents and will not need to access any workers compensation. The City of Gosnells, which is a fantastic employer, will be doing those works. I commend the council for getting those works done. The removal of those speed bumps is imminent. Members will be aware that we are funding \$475 000 to remove all the speed bumps up and down Harpenden Street in Southern River and Huntingdale, and that will involve very hands-on work. That work will require important safety protocols to ensure that this workers compensation legislation does not need to be accessed by the workers there. The works will involve unscrewing and removing some very long and large speed bumps that have been in the middle of Harpenden Street for close to a decade now. The works will involve the creation and laying of concrete slabs and roundabouts and chicanes. It is very, very important work for our community, but, again, I come back to the fact that it is very, very important that existing work practices by the employer and the work done by the employees are carried out so that every family gets to have their family member come home after they have completed each of our works.

I understand that one of the great outcomes of this legislation process will be a single, modern act that will cover workers compensation and injury management in this state. I commend this bill.

[Member's time extended.]

**Mr T.J. HEALY:** I have said this before in this chamber. I remember when the then Minister for Commerce and Industrial Relations brought forward the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Amendment Bill 2017, which we debated in this house in 2018. I am a teacher by trade. I did half a tiling apprenticeship when I was about 17; I did not complete it. I have generally been a high school teacher by trade. The work I have done is different from other members of my family. There is some complex and dangerous work out there, but there is absolutely no reason why any family member should not get to go home to their family after their day at work. They should be able to go home not only alive, but also safe. I am going to quote from a previous speech of the Deputy Speaker, because he spoke very well. It would be fantastic if no family loses a family member as a result of a workplace incident or fatality. That is a wonderful aspirational goal. Unfortunately, accidents do happen, and when they happen, it is appropriate and important that people and their families receive adequate compensation and support. When there has been a catastrophic injury, no amount of money will replace a loved one—a father, mother, auntie, uncle or grandparent—but it is important for the families, couples and children to recognise that, as a result of the incident, they will receive appropriate remuneration for the loss of income or to aid the loved one's recovery. As I have said before, sometimes injuries take out the person who is bringing in an income. It is commendable to ensure that a support scheme is in place so that the injured person gets rehabilitation to recover and can continue to work.

I would like to put on the record that I believe that, on the whole, the majority of employers are good employers. They look after their workers. They do. We have a wonderful relationship with employers who look after one of their greatest assets, which is their staff. That is a key part of their business philosophy. The occupational health and safety bills that have gone through this Parliament were designed to acknowledge that employers had to pay a certain amount. We want companies to look at this not just as a financial arrangement regarding how much they are required to pay workers for an injury or a death. I come back to the clarity that I mentioned earlier. It is very, very important that employers know the amounts involved to make sure that they are steered in the correct direction. Of course, I am sure every employer seeks to avoid injury and fatalities. But, unfortunately, there will be workplace errors and human error, and when those accidents happen, we need bills like this in place. I look forward to the day when we progress through the year without any fatalities or workplace injuries. That can happen and it will happen. We will get to that point. I would like to mention how sorry I am for our past losses. I can only imagine the loss that some members of my community have felt.

If we compare past years, we can see that things have got a lot better in the construction and building industry and a number of other hands-on construction and mining-sector related industries. Unfortunately, there are still workplace accidents at workplaces that involve physical and demanding work. I commend those who do the right thing and work with the unions, employers and representatives to ensure that everyone does the right thing. There are those who do not always do the right thing. I have said in other places as well as here that I think the historical work of unions working with employers in partnership is a better move forward. It is my experience that it is better when unions and workers work together on their on-site practices and engage in dialogue about safety and best practice to ensure that everyone gets to go home safely. I commend the unions for their historical work with employers. I would like to commend the millions of union members who have paid their dues, over a century of struggle, and have ensured that workplace safety has improved.

I was the State School Teachers' Union of WA representative at my school when I was a teacher at Southern River College. I have mentioned before that the workplace injuries we had were different from injuries at mine and construction sites and from the driving and transport sectors. Some injuries happened on school excursions. Sometimes they were the result of altercations with passionate students, staff or parents. I found that it was most important to have a dialogue between our principal, who represented the department, and me, as the union rep, to illustrate when issues were becoming a concern. A parent might have been too passionate and perhaps got aggressive towards a staff member. A student might have been going through a volatile time in their life, which every teenager will experience. Sometimes the worksite—the classroom or the excursion site—was not safe or the workload became an issue. When I worked in student services, which basically comprised the student year coordinator, the psychologists and people like that, we would often refer to the darkness because of some of the things we had to deal with when looking after our students. We heard stories about some people's home lives—this is occurring across every community in Western Australia, unfortunately—involving abuse, poverty or neglect. Those stories and engagements created vicarious trauma and affected people's ability to do their jobs over the long term. I had a joint role as a union rep but also in student services. We had a very, very good and strong culture. I believed that the staff members could approach the principal and raise matters. If they did not feel comfortable doing that, they could raise them with me as the union representative, partially anonymously, or, together, we could raise them with our employer to make sure that things would not escalate and lead to an outcome that would not be beneficial for anyone.

I have had a number of different careers over the years. As I mentioned earlier, I would not say that I was a tiler, but I began my tiling training. I am still a bus driver and have been a forklift driver, a marriage celebrant and a staffer. I have had all sorts of different roles and each has had different employers in different working environments. I spent time as a service station attendant for Coles Express and Shell. It is interesting that Coles Express has now taken a different approach from when I worked for it. We would be allocated a 10-hour shift by ourselves with no

security screens. Now, people work double shifts and have far better training and support. They also have security screens and duress alarms and are trained on what to do with the volatile fuel load that the workplace sits on if there is a spill or an explosion. It is far better these days. In every case and in every workplace I have been in, I have sought to support our union having a dialogue with our employers.

Again, I acknowledge the many families of workers who have sustained injuries or lost someone in the workplace. It is very important that families get to return home. I commend the bill and the work that was done by all the people who bring legislation like this to us.

I will give a final shout-out to my staff. I think that the Acting Speaker is probably considered more the employer of my staff than me, but I thank all my electorate staff for all the work they do looking after my office. I especially thank Seren, Tammy and James. I also hope that I never put them in a situation whereby they need to make a workers compensation claim, because I have created a workplace that is safe and they feel comfortable to raise matters with the union membership and me. Ben Wyatt has often said that a member of Parliament is only as good as their staff. I am good because I have great staff. To Tammy, Seren and James, thank you for the work you do looking after all my constituents and all their families so they can do what they do. I give a special shout-out to Lincoln as well, who recently moved from my office. I thank him for all the time he spent and the work he did.

I again come back to my desire that this bill will not need to be referred to because there will be no workers compensation claims. That would be ideal. I look forward to the day when this government, perhaps the thirtieth or fortieth year of the McGowan government, has a red-tape committee and we look back at this piece of legislation that is no longer needed because bills of this type have not been needed because people have not been injured or died at work. Would that not be a glorious thing? The Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 is one of many introduced by our Minister for Industrial Relations—I thank him again—that protects families, workers and my community. Any death or injury at any workplace is one too many, and we can work towards removing that occurrence.

I briefly mention a debate that was held in this place during the previous Parliament on the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Amendment Bill 2017. The then member for Hillarys and the current member for Moore had claimed that if we were to create too many workers compensation schemes, the premiums and costs to employers would rise and we would cost businesses out of business and therefore make business and services too expensive. The member for Forrestfield gave a great speech in reply to those assertions, which I referred to in my contribution to that second reading debate. I stated, in part —

... the member for Moore suggested that if we increased the amount of money that those families may attract, then we may need to look at increasing premiums.

I then referred to the member for Forrestfield, who I quoted as having said —

... we can actually stop discussions about any increases in premiums by not killing people.

I can add to that—by not injuring people if businesses invest funds to ensure that their workers get to go home without injury or death. When there are no deaths or injuries on worksites and every family member gets to go home, we will not need to worry about increases in premiums or the application of certain legislation because there will have been no workplace injuries or fatalities and families will have been kept safe.

Again, every worker has the right to come home to their family in the same condition as when they left. Looking after working people and working families and their employers should be a priority of all governments. I am very, very proud to be part of the McGowan Labor government, which supports that principle.

**DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands)** [1.11 pm]: I rise today to speak in support of the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023, which modernises Western Australia's workers compensation laws and, very importantly, makes the process more accessible for participants in the scheme, creates conditions that enable more privacy and dignity for participants, and removes opportunities for discrimination by future employers.

Accessibility will be improved by creating a more logical structure for the scheme, as well as plain language to make it easier to read and understand key aspects of the scheme. This means greater clarity and certainty for scheme participants when considering such fundamental questions as who is covered, whether insurance is required, how to make a claim, what compensation is available and how to manage and resolve disputes. I think it is fair to assume—it has been my observation with friends and colleagues who have gone through a workers compensation process—that the actual fact of needing workers compensation is stressful and difficult in and of itself because, by definition, something has occurred in the workplace that impacts their health or functioning in some way. Indeed, in speaking to a colleague about her experience of a workers compensation claim she made some 20 years ago, the emotions are very close to the surface even now. The injury she sustained has an ongoing impact on her daily life and has also impacted her employment experiences, including her ability to return to work. The process of applying for and navigating the workers compensation scheme and system should not add unduly to what is already a stressful situation. However, it is unfortunate that many people's experiences of workers compensation are of having to fight for the recognition of their rights as workers—both at the time of the claim and subsequently, as they navigate a return to the workplace.

Given this impact and experience, it is really important to note that the bill before us today is the result of an extensive consultation process with all key stakeholders. There were 86 submissions to the draft consultation on the bill over a four-month submission period in late 2021. The bill also builds on an extensive review process that began in 2009 and subsequently resulted in the 2014 *Review of the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981: Final report*, which included some 171 recommendations for rewriting the act.

There are two aspects of the bill I would like to pay particular attention to. Firstly, I highlight what I consider to be a very important aspect of this bill, as it ensures the privacy and dignity of employees—that is, the prohibition of an employer or an employer's agent from attending a medical consultation when a worker is being examined by their treating medical practitioner. It could be argued that the inherent power differential between employer and employee makes this highly problematic under any circumstances, and even more so when an employee is additionally vulnerable because, by definition, they are injured in some way; and additionally vulnerable again because the outcomes and decisions of that medical examination have very important and meaningful immediate and ongoing consequences for the worker.

The changes in the bill before us mean that a worker's privacy and dignity will be protected, but also that the power balance will be somewhat restored, as the worker will be able to have an open dialogue with their treating practitioner. It will also remove the opportunity for an employer or their agent to place undue pressure on the medical practitioner to make a particular decision when issuing a certificate of capacity. Importantly, however, the bill will not prevent communication with the treating medical practitioner about return-to-work options—these being about ensuring worker safety and health, and providing an employer with the opportunity to put in place the best structures, supports and duties for an employee returning to work.

The second change I would like to talk about is the measures for preventing discrimination in pre-employment screening. To prevent these kinds of discriminatory practices, the bill will prohibit employers or recruitment agencies from asking any person, as part of pre-employment screening, to disclose information about whether they have made any claim for compensation. The bill will also prevent any other person from disclosing information about a worker's compensation claim previously made by a worker for the purposes of pre-employment screening.

As I said, I have a colleague who made a workers compensation claim nearly 20 years ago. Despite the passage of time, she is still required to disclose that claim to potential new employers. This is someone who is highly qualified and highly experienced in their sector. They are very well respected and a person of great principle and integrity, yet they had a sense of shame in their need to access workers compensation, even though it was their right and entitlement to do so. However, there was more to come for this colleague. The nature of their injury meant that they were not able to return to their previous workplace where the injury had been sustained, as it was related to stress arising from bullying. Upon attempting to return to the workforce after their recovery and applying for over 20 jobs in a sector that they were well qualified for and well experienced and respected in, they got a standard rejection letter each and every time without ever proceeding to the next recruitment stage. For all those job applications, they had disclosed in the required application forms that they had previously made a successful workers compensation claim. This person—this professional person of great integrity—then made a decision that went against those principles and applied for a job without disclosing that they had made a previous compensation claim. They got the job.

We have a system that allows for this kind of discrimination and puts workers in the position of having to make a decision—a decision that goes against their principles and standards—in order to re-enter the workforce. I am proud that this bill will remove that opportunity for active discrimination and will mean that good people will no longer be in the position of having to avoid a damaging truth in order to secure their rightful return to the workforce.

This person's story shows something else that I would like to highlight—the particular complexities of workers compensation for what I would call invisible injuries. In my profession of social work, our work hazards tend to be less visible, being as they are about vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, stress and burnout. Our workplace injuries then tend to look like anxiety, stress and post-traumatic stress disorder. I often describe social workers as brokers in hope, in part because the places we go are sometimes dark, with experiences of hopelessness and helplessness.

I will relay some of the experiences that my friends, my partner and I have had as social workers. I acknowledge that I stand here as a social worker of 25 years and can kind of relay some of these experiences, but they are not easy ones to hear or talk about. Hon Don Punch will also be very familiar with some of these experiences. When my husband worked for the after-hours child protection service, he would often attend with the Tactical Response Group to apprehend children in the middle of the night. He would turn up to houses that were chaotic and violent—often that violence was drug-fuelled—and see children who had fresh injuries. He would accompany those children to hospital and, as a stranger, be their one and only comfort at a bewildering and difficult time of crisis that they were not necessarily able to understand.

As a child protection worker myself, I had to sit and listen to a man describe how he had sexually abused his eight-year-old niece but should be allowed to stay at home with his daughter of a similar age because apparently he was no threat to her. I have been to the funerals of two young people who were meant to be safe at home. I have held women and their partners as they sobbed over their dead babies. I have been to too many memorial services

for babies at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, lost through miscarriage and stillbirth. I have laid on the floor in the emergency department with a couple whose child had drowned. I have listened to people's stories of their childhood sexual abuse inside institutions that were meant to keep them safe, tears streaming down their face about events that were now decades old but continued to impact their daily life.

I have been called names that I certainly will not repeat here. We sometimes used to joke that being called one particular name was a rite of passage. I see the minister nodding because I am pretty sure he knows the name that I am talking about. We were not a real social worker until we had been called that particular name. We joke, but it was not really funny. We build in many safety mechanisms in our profession—emotional, social and supervisory supports and, yes, sometimes black humour as well. Our employers are the ones who provide many of those structures and supports as well, yet the work is difficult and complex and it changes who you are as a human being. It is also work that others do not really want to know about.

When I was a social worker at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, we used to be on a roster to do after-hours work. I remember being on call and going to a party on a Saturday night. Somebody asked what kinds of things I might get called in for. Because I had been at the hospital for most of the previous 24 hours, I was pretty tired and did not really think very carefully about my response, so I was honest. I told him about going in for a child who had died in a motor vehicle accident in Kalgoorlie. The child had been flown down to Perth and mum and dad were on their way. I told him about a young child—a toddler—who had been admitted to hospital with a sexually transmitted infection, and how I helped a family from a remote Aboriginal community to find food and accommodation in the middle of the night when their child was flown to PMH by the Royal Flying Doctor Service for emergency surgery. The person at that party could not get away quick enough. This is work that we do that is complex and often invisible and, as I said, that people do not necessarily want to know about. As I said, it changes who we are at times. It changes how we interact with the world. I am privileged enough to be grateful for some of those experiences. We would often say that when some of those things stop upsetting you, it is time to think about moving on. But in workers compensation terms, there is often an additional struggle to have these kinds of invisible injuries recognised and diagnosed, and also a complexity in connecting them directly to the actual experience of the workplace.

There is already a stigma attached to mental health. Ironically, that stigma also exists in the helping profession, perhaps in different ways. Our union affiliation as social workers is also often driven by our workplace. For example, I have variously been a member of the Health Services Union of Western Australia, a workplace delegate at Fremantle Hospital and the Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA, which in the beginning involved working on case load limits when I worked for Child Protection and the National Tertiary Education Union, which of course was very prominent in helping us navigate the impact of COVID-19 on the university sector when the Liberal federal government of the time sent us down the river without a paddle.

Some workplaces, such as universities, are more unionised than others. Often social workers need to seek out union membership in their particular workplace. As a social work educator, I used to encourage students to consider joining their union, noting that union membership is for a whole range of professions and workplaces. Often, unions could provide things for us that our professional association and our workplace were not able to, such as help navigating the workers compensation system. I point this out as it is often with the support of their unions that workers are assisted to not only manage the workers compensation system and their employers' responses and demands, but also provide that support to persevere with what can be a very challenging experience.

I want to tell the story of a friend who experienced significant post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of working as a social worker in an acute setting—a setting where she commonly bore witness to violence between family members. She had a very complex experience of getting a diagnosis and having that diagnosis and her experience of PTSD directly linked to the workplace. Of course, PTSD can be related to a particular incident, but it can also be because of the cumulative impact of being exposed to stressful and distressing events in a workplace setting. Similar to my other colleague, she was not able to return to that workplace. I am very proud of her because she has reinvented herself and managed to return to the workplace that unfortunately for social work was not a return to that profession but where she is still able to assist others. Without effective workers compensation, she would not have been able to afford to do that and her mental health would have continued to decline.

I want to finish by giving a shout-out to my social work colleagues to say that there are many of us who see the difficult and complex work that you do and we see the human toll that it often takes on people. I thank them for their perseverance in continuing to be brokers in hope.

There are a couple of other changes in the bill, which I know my colleagues have already spoken of, including delivering on the 2021 election commitment to double the medical cap. The bill will increase the limit for compensable medical and health expenses from 30 to 60 per cent of the prescribed maximum limit. This will result in an increase in the capped amount from around \$73 000 to \$146 000, which will be indexed annually. This will see workers who are seriously injured requiring long hospital stays and/or complex surgical operations receive an appropriate level of financial support to cover their medical and health treatment bills. Again, it will save them some anxiety and concern over meeting some of those costs.

Another election commitment that this bill will deliver on is extending the weekly income compensation step-down point from 13 to 26 weeks before a 15 per cent reduction is applied. This will maintain a safety net minimum amount to ensure the step-down cannot fall below a worker's base award rate of pay, plus any regular additional earnings a worker received over the previous 12 months from the date of injury.

[Member's time extended.]

**Dr K. STRATTON:** This extension will ensure that award workers on base award rates of pay, or who rely on regular additional earnings to make ends meet, are not disadvantaged after the step down as is the case in the current act. Again, this will go some way towards reducing the anxiety and concern that people have about being able to meet the costs of daily living as they navigate the workers compensation process.

Finally, the bill will provide lifetime care and assistance for a person who is involved in a catastrophic workplace injury. A no-fault catastrophic injury support scheme for motor vehicle accidents was implemented in Western Australia on 1 July 2016. This bill will provide scope for the catastrophic injury support scheme to be extended to also apply to workers who are catastrophically injured. In doing so, workers who suffer catastrophic injuries at work may receive lifetime tailored care and support that is based on their ongoing needs. Catastrophically injured workers will retain the right to seek common-law damages should they prefer that pathway.

I commend this bill to the house. It will put workers' rights at the centre and their right to dignity and privacy and their right to re-enter the workforce free from discrimination at the forefront.

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie-Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [1.30 pm]: I also rise to contribute to the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 and the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Amendment Bill 2023 cognate debate. In starting my contribution today, I will reiterate a point that a number of other members have already made. The premise that all workplaces should undertake and strive to achieve is ensuring that every single worker returns home to their family safely and healthily at the end of each day. Sadly, this is not a reality in our society. It is certainly something that we aim improve in enacting this legislation.

In saying that, I want to give a background to what the dinner table looked like when I was young. My dad worked at Bunnings mill in Yarloop when I was very young and then he managed to get a job at Alcoa in Wagerup when I was a little older. Dad became one of the shop stewards or delegates, as we now call them, for the Australian Workers' Union. If he were here today—he is not because he passed away—he would say that he is personally responsible for everything that the member for Forrestfield knows about workplace industrial relations. My dad and the member for Forrestfield worked very closely together during their time at Alcoa. I remember sitting around the dinner table listening to my parents speak about dad's work. Dad was particularly concerned about the workers on that site in the initial stages of Alcoa being commissioned. He was concerned about safety and making sure that the plant and equipment were safe for the workers. The particular thing I remember my dad talking about—I do not remember the specifics—was caustic soda and the issues it could create on that worksite. As I said, I was quite young when dad worked there. I listened to my parents' conversations and although I did not necessarily absorb all the details, I distinctly remember those two themes being discussed at length by my parents at the dinner table.

Dad was also particularly passionate about the rosters. When he first started working at Alcoa, they had a fantastic—I say that with sarcasm—roster, which, I think, was a week of day shifts, a week of afternoon shifts and a week of night shifts and then a week off. It was a terrible shift. I remember that as kids, we had to tiptoe around because dad was asleep or dad was grumpy because he had not had sleep; one of the two was always at play in our household.

In prefacing my contribution today, I acknowledge the role that unions have played in partnership with workplaces on the issue of safety at workplaces. Their role in supporting workers if and when they need to access workers compensation is very important.

I will give a brief overview of the bill and then I will look at specific examples. I would like to firstly say that one of the best things about this bill is the plain language that it employs, which will make it easier to read and understand the key elements within the workers compensation scheme. It is difficult for a person who wants to make a workers compensation claim to read and understand some of the details in the current legislation. The commitment to simplify the language will mean that workers compensation will be much more accessible to people. The bill will provide more clarity and certainty around what people will need to do to claim, whether insurance will be required, how to claim, what compensation is available and how to resolve disputes; it is particularly important that that is very clear.

The member for Nedlands spoke about the doubling of the medical cap; I will not go into that in too much detail other than to say that for those people who have been injured in a workplace incident that results in hospital stays, complex surgical operations or extended medical leave, those things become very stressful and often very expensive. A lot of the concern of people who undertake claims is how they will pay their bills. The provision that doubles the medical cap is a really important aspect of the bill.

The step-down point will be extended from 13 to 26 weeks, which is particularly important. I will pick up on this point later when I provide members some examples of workers compensation claims that I have been involved in as a member of the teaching profession.



Over the last 30 years, my role in schools has been as an occupational health and safety representative, the teachers' union delegate and most recently as a deputy principal who assisted staff through the occupational safety and health process. In that role, I was often the first responder at incidents in the school situation. The member for Southern River commented on some of the occupational safety and health risks in schools and I will add to that in my contribution today. I will give members a couple of examples of the issues I observed when I was the occupational safety and health delegate or deputy principal. Comparatively speaking, when we think about schools, we do not see them as particularly dangerous workplaces, but there are certainly some inherent risks.

Something as simple as a teacher's broken chair—I have seen this happen—can be the cause of a teacher being away from work for an extended period. When the teacher sat on the broken chair, they fell over and received a whiplash injury during their fall to the ground. The teacher ended up with a debilitating neck injury and ongoing debilitating headaches. Something as innocuous as a chair in a classroom can be considered a hazard within the workplace. High school kids often play a joke on a teacher, "It's just a prank, Miss", which I have been told several times. I have seen students pull out the chair on which the teacher is about to sit—this has happened to me—and although students and their classmates might think that that is hilarious, I have seen that kind of action result in the teacher having extended periods away from the classroom due to injury associated with pranking.

I do not know whether I should share this with the chamber, but in deference to that, in the good old days of teaching—I am talking about 30-something years ago—sometimes people got away with things that they would not get away with these days. I am not saying that in a—what is the word I am looking for?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk):** Nostalgic.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** A nostalgic way. Clearly, it is incorrect. Thank you, Acting Speaker.

I used to say to students that I did not want them to come into my classroom chewing gum because I felt that there might be a risk of them choking on that. I did not want to be in the position of having to do the Heimlich manoeuvre or anything like that to make sure they could still breathe. In particular, I was not interested in giving anyone mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or having to do CPR in the classroom. I said, "If you could please remove your chewing gum, that would be much appreciated." I used to get a chuckle. Back in the good old days, I used to say to my students, "If you come into my classroom with chewing gum and you are the first student who enters my classroom, you're the lucky one because you will get to put that on the doorjamb of the classroom." The problem would be if they were the second student, because the second student would have to put theirs at the bottom and take the top one from the previous student. I never had a problem with chewing gum in my classroom. The kids took me very seriously and, of course, we mitigated the risk of choking on chewing gum in my classroom. I say that in jest only because students used to prank teachers and teachers also had the opportunity to have a joke with their students.

I used to say to the students that one of the most appalling things they could do was to leave their schoolbag on the floor of the classroom next to their desk because although it was out of their way, it was not out of the way of the teacher who was trying to move around the classroom. I have seen a number of teachers injured by tripping over schoolbags that were left in the walkways for staff to move around the classroom to assist students. On one occasion it was Jodie versus stairs, and the stairs won. I was going down a set of stairs at Collie Senior High School. It happened right in front of my daughter. Members would think she would come to my assistance, but she was so embarrassed that I had done that in front of her friends that she scurried off as quickly as she possibly could. When I got up and dusted myself off and checked that I had not injured myself, she came back to check on me and said, "Mum, you are so embarrassing." Kids these days!

Another thing that is important in mitigating occupational health and safety risks, particularly in a science classroom, is the avoidance of chemical spills and the exposure to chemicals. Science laboratory technicians do an incredible amount of work to assist teachers to ensure that students can safely explore the scientific concepts around chemistry and those sorts of things, while mitigating the risk to staff and students. One of the most catastrophic injuries I witnessed at school was to a student who was playing T-ball on the oval. The student was very good at T-ball and as the equipment was being packed up by the phys ed teacher, the student said, "Can I just have one more go, Miss?" To the teacher's detriment in this situation she said, "Of course, mate—have another go and we'll all stand out in the field." The student decided that they were going to hit the ball as hard and as far as they possibly could. They got fabulous rotation through their upper body but fell to the ground in a heap. When I was called to the oval to assist, it turned out that that 16-year-old person had broken their hip. I could not believe it. When the ambulance arrived, we were gobsmacked that that student had broken their hip. That young person was the bravest person I have ever seen.

I mention also the amazing job that education assistants do in our schools. They deal with special needs students with a range of different abilities. One of the inherent risks around special needs teaching is that a number of students are on the autism spectrum or have disabilities that mean they are not able to control or self-regulate. I have seen education assistants hit, bitten or pushed by special needs students. A number of the occupational health and safety incidents I have had to either manage as a staff member or be involved with as the occupational safety and health representative have come about with special needs education assistants. They do an incredible job in schools across the state. I take this opportunity to thank them. I used to say as a teacher that they were the unsung heroes of classrooms. We could not do what we do in classrooms without them. I pay them a very special thanks today.

The last incident I will mention that I have been involved with in schools was a particularly confronting incident quite a few years ago now. I came out of my classroom and a student had been waiting outside for another student in my classroom because they had a conflict with them. When the student left my classroom, the young man was waiting outside and as I was locking up the classroom, I heard some shouting and turned around to see the older boy bashing the younger boy's head against the brick wall. I was horrified. Another teacher came over to assist. I am still not sure what the issue was because it was not dealt with by me. The young boy was so angry that he did not stop when the other teacher came over to step in between them. That young man gave the teacher a black eye and she was knocked out. I had a young person with a bleeding head wound and a teacher who had been knocked out and was on the ground.

In the end, I did the only thing I could think of, which was to physically restrain him to the point where he was no longer able to lash out. I was saying to him, "Come with me, let's go. We'll go and talk about it in the office." I managed to get him away and, obviously, some assistance came for the people who were injured. I suffered a shoulder injury as a result of having him walk with me, and that has been ongoing. I had a workers compensation claim around that incident.

None of us is immune from workers compensation claims in our workplaces. If one goes for a job anywhere else, a question on the form they must complete asks: have you ever completed a workers compensation claim previously? You tick yes, but you wonder whether that will impact on your opportunities for employment in other industries. I am pleased that this issue is being addressed.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** I would also like to raise today some incidents in the mining industry in Western Australia over many years—hundreds of years—that have caused significant injury or death to people in the workplace. Workplace fatalities are particularly devastating to the families of those involved and the communities. I take this opportunity to extend my condolences to families who have suffered that loss. I raised the point at the beginning of my speech that everybody deserves to go to work and come home to their family safely and healthily. An amazing Facebook page called Western Australian Virtual Miners Memorial details mining accidents over hundreds of years. If anyone has any spare time, I implore them to look at that page. The minister is nodding and is obviously aware of that.

I appreciate how important these legislative changes are in dealing with workplace incidents and accidents. I will talk today about a fatality that happened in Collie. A verdict of accidental death was delivered in Bunbury on 21 November 1890, because the incident occurred in 1899—sorry, it was in 1900! I could see people thinking, "No, you've got the maths wrong there." Thank you, minister. The incident occurred in 1899 and a verdict of accidental death was delivered in—I have lost it again!

**Mr R.R. Whitby:** In 1900.

**Ms J.L. HANNS:** Thank you, minister; it was in 1900. An article states —

The inquest in connection with the death of Eldred Henry Keswick, who died in the Bunbury Hospital, on the 11th ... as the result of injuries received in an explosion at the Westralia Wallsend mine, Collie, on the 3rd ... was concluded here today, before the coroner ... The verdict was one of accidental death, no blame being attached to anyone.

Eldred Henry Keswick died on 11 November 1899. He was a miner and he had one child. He was aged 44 at the time of his death. The miners memorial page outlines that around the time of the incident and the subsequent seeking of compensation for this man's death, *The Sunday Times* of Sunday, 27 May 1900—I have got the year right now—carried a report with the heading "Working men insure their employers. A heartless system. Thrift as an engine of oppression", which stated —

On Friday afternoon last the editor of the SUNDAY TIMES received the following letter: "Sir,—Will you kindly allow me space in your valuable paper to tender my heartfelt thanks to the collier and employees of the Westralian Wallsend Colliery for their many kind expressions of sympathy, also for the way they have manfully assisted in getting up subscriptions for me in the hour of need. By their kindness it will enable me to get medical advice and attendance for my little girl, who has had to stand aside through reverse of circumstances that compel me to work six days out of seven for the mere necessities of life. I would like also to draw attention to the unfeeling attitude of the Accident Insurance Company, who, because I refused to sign papers exonerating the Wallsend Colliery Co. from all blame, declined to give me the 50 pounds of an insurance which covered my husband's life, and who are still holding it, though it's seven months since the accident occurred which caused my husband's death. This 50 pounds I was supposed to receive at, death. As they knew, my straitened circumstances, I think it very hard and unfeeling on the society's part. Again thanking the Coal miners' Association and apologising for troubling you—I am, D. KESWICK.

That letter was from the widow of Eldred, who was seeking compensation for her husband from the employer, which it did not stump up. It must have been incredibly difficult for that person at that time. I can only imagine the circumstances that his widow went through at that moment.

In looking further into this issue, the miners memorial page goes further to say —

The whole of the moneys collected from men like Keswick on this colliery went to pay the premium for a general policy insuring the company not the men ... against accidents. In other words, the men paid the premiums, and the company got the policy, and then after the men paying the whole.

The company itself was not responsible for workers compensation in this case; the men were paying the insurance for all workers on the site so that if anyone was catastrophically injured or died on the worksite, their widows or families would receive compensation. That did not happen in this case. If I had more time, I would go through and read the whole article, because it is an incredible read in terms of the circumstances. Essentially, they were forced to pay up. That really displays the difference between how workers compensation incidents were treated and the changes we are looking to make, and why it is important for workers compensation to be brought forward with these changes and updates.

The example of Eldred Henry Keswick, who passed away in the Collie coalfields, starkly reminded me of the amazing painting by Australian painter John Longstaff called *Breaking the news*. The last time I saw it, it was housed in the Art Gallery of Western Australia; I am not sure whether it is still there or on rotation. The painting shows the interior of a mining cottage on the Victorian goldfields, with an old man breaking the news to a woman of her husband's death in a mining accident. The woman holds an infant in her arms, and two miners appear in the doorway, carrying the body of her husband on a stretcher. Behind them in the distance stands the mine's head frame. *Breaking the news* became etched in the popular imagination and, by the 1890s, was known through reproductions in every mining township in Australia, such was the impact of that painting. That painting was completed when Longstaff was still an art student. He won the National Gallery of Victoria Art School's first travelling scholarship in 1887. Only one month after the painting was first exhibited in Melbourne, 81 coalminers perished in a gas explosion at the Bulli mine in New South Wales. Australia's worst below-ground goldmine disaster occurred on 12 December 1882, less than 20 kilometres from Longstaff's home town of Clunes. Longstaff's enduring childhood memory of a mining fatality in Clunes was the direct inspiration for *Breaking the news*. As he had followed the tragic cortege from the mine head to the cottage door, he had heard the stricken cry of a young wife at the sight of the stretcher bearer's burden. The painting is incredibly compelling in terms of Australia's mining history and tells the story of the losses of people in communities and families right across Australia. Really, it underlines the importance of these very important changes to the workers compensation scheme.

As I said previously, I have worked in industrial towns and mining communities. They tend to inherently hold more risk. I mentioned that my dad worked at Alcoa in Wagerup and at the Bunnings mill. I taught at Tom Price Senior High School. The mining industry is incredibly important to that region. While I was teaching at Tom Price Senior High School back in the 1990s, there was a fatality on the minefields in Tom Price. I remember that it was incredibly devastating. The person who died had been in the football club that I had attached myself to, as you do when you move to towns like that, and I supported that particular football club. His loss reverberated right through the community. I remember seeing his widow and their very young three-year-old not long after the tragic accident. Needless to say, that family was devastated beyond repair. I outlined the example from the 1890s in Collie, but even in the last decade, there was a loss in the mining industry in Collie as well. As I said, we are dealing with inherently dangerous occupations.

That brings me to mention very briefly the Beaconsfield mine collapse that most of us in the chamber would remember, as it was front-page news and on the television almost all day every day for nearly two weeks, I think, by the time the miners were rescued. It happened on Anzac Day, 25 April, in 2006 in Beaconsfield, Tasmania. Of the 17 people who were in the mine at the time, 14 escaped immediately following the collapse; one miner, Larry Knight, was killed on impact; and the remaining two, Brant Webb and Todd Russell, were found alive on the sixth day by their rescuers. Such danger is implicitly known by the psyche of mining communities, where people are sent into dangerous worksites. That again draws me back to why this bill is so important. Larry Knight, Brant Webb and Todd Russell were unaccounted for until where they were trapped could be located. At the time of the incident, they were obviously involved in coalmining. The cage they were operating in partially filled with rock and the men were buried under the rubble. Two miners were able to survive by drinking groundwater seeping through rock overhead, which they collected in their helmets. Famously, Webb also had a muesli bar with him.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 1655.]

#### **VISITORS — LESMURDIE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND CHAMBER OF MINERALS AND ENERGY**

*Statement by Speaker*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** [1.59 pm]: I acknowledge some guests for question time. On behalf of the member for Kalamunda, please welcome the year 6 leadership group from Lesmurdie Primary School and their principal, Louise Armstrong, visiting Parliament today. I also acknowledge the member for Kalgoorlie's guests here today from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy from right across the state. It includes the member for Kalgoorlie's daughter, Danielle.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE****COST OF LIVING — FEES AND CHARGES****218. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:**

I refer to the cost-of-living crisis impacting households and families across Western Australia and the failure of the McGowan Labor government to soften the blow.

- (1) Will the Premier freeze fees and charges in the upcoming budget to alleviate his government's cost burden on households?
- (2) Will the Premier bolster the not-for-profit sector through increased funding, noting the growing pressure on that sector to support Western Australian families?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

- (1)–(2) Obviously, the budget will come down on 11 May and will reveal the situation at that point in time. The premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question is incorrect. He said that we had not done anything in this regard. Last year's budget, in overall terms, actually put the basket of household goods and services provided by the state government down; this was the only government in Australia that did that. We put it down, from memory, around 3.8 per cent. The cost of goods and services provided by the state went down. At the same time, the inflation rate was significant. It was a remarkable thing that no other government in Australia has been able to do. When members opposite were in power for eight years, they put up electricity by 80 per cent and water by around 80 per cent as well. That is what they did. It was 10 per cent per annum. I remember in the early years, 2009 and 2010, power prices were going up 25 per cent a year under the Leader of the Opposition's government. That is what they did. It is a bit rich to come in here now and start saying things like this as though they do not have a history. They do have a history; that was their record. There were record increases in the cost of living, record increases in debt, record increases in deficits and record increases in taxes. Land tax went up three times; remember that? Members opposite cancelled tax cuts that were legislated when they arrived in office. That is what they did in office.

A few of the other things we have done over the last two years or so includes two household electricity credits, worth \$1 000, to families around the state. We put up electricity fees by less than the rate of inflation, so there is actually a net decrease in people's cost of living in overall terms. We capped public transport fares at two zones, which is a huge improvement for people around Western Australia all the way down to Dawesville. We capped regional airfares, something that had never been done before. We capped the cost of regional airfares for people living in the regions. It is receding into history now, but we also provided free RATs. Remember the massive campaigns in the eastern states? They were very expensive in the eastern states, and we made them available to everyone in Western Australia because we kept our society open and we achieved the best COVID outcomes anywhere in the world with what we did.

We will hand down the budget in May and everything will be plain then.

**COST OF LIVING — FEES AND CHARGES****219. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Premier:**

I have a supplementary question. Will the Premier commit to zero increases in fees and charges in the upcoming budget?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

I just answered that question.

**ACTIV FOUNDATION — WORKPOWER****220. Dr K. STRATTON to the Premier:**

I refer to the decision made by the Activ Foundation last year to close its large-scale industrial worksites.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how the McGowan Labor government, in partnership with the Albanese federal government, has supported a smooth transition for Activ Foundation-supported employees?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house what the transition of these large-scale worksites to Workpower will mean for its supported employees?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

I thank the member for Nedlands for the question and her history of work in this field.

- (1)–(2) In May 2022, the Activ Foundation announced plans to close its large-scale worksites in Western Australia, of which there are around seven or eight around the state. Basically, they are almost factories. A lot of people with disabilities work there doing important and productive work to provide goods and support for industry around Western Australia. Around 700 people with disabilities in Western Australia worked in Activ industries. It was started in the 1950s by a group of parents whose children had disabilities. They wanted them to have productive activity in their days. It is a wonderful organisation that has done that work over all

these years. What occurred, of course, is that last year Activ announced it was going to phase out of this, moving to other areas of endeavour. The Minister for Disability Services and I learnt about this, and we went to the commonwealth government to ask whether we could work out a transition by which we kept Activ open and ensured the 700 supported employees continued to work while we worked out an alternative option.

To their credit and despite their budget situation, the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Bill Shorten, and Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, joined us. They provided \$7.8 million and we put in \$4 million. That gave time so we could work out an alternative arrangement. As of the other day, we were able to announce that an alternative arrangement has been reached. A business called Workpower will take over the workshops and transition the worksites, and that means the people with disabilities in these worksites will be able to continue to work in the same sites and undertake this productive work that they have been doing. The transition is expected to be complete by 30 June. I saw some of the stuff they produce the other day. For example, it is folding serviettes for Qatar Airways or working to put new stickers on cans of beans to outline Australian requirements for beans imported from Britain. I did not know we import mushy peas from England, but there you go—we do. There was a lot of them. We have a standard by which a can has to say how much salt and other things are in it. People are putting stickers on the cans. They do lots of important work and important jobs in those sorts of fields undertaken by people with disabilities. It was wonderful; it has comradery and fun. People were talking to one another and it is social. I met the mums and dads of some of the people working there, and the families were so happy that they were teary. It was a good thing and I am very pleased we were able to achieve this outcome. I thank the commonwealth government, and I would especially like to thank the Minister for Disability Services and Workpower for all their work.

#### RESIDENTIAL EATING DISORDER TREATMENT FACILITY

##### 221. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the *Four Corners* program aired last month that detailed how underprepared Western Australia's health system is to deal with eating disorders and that the former coalition federal government committed funding for a WA residential eating disorder centre four years ago. Given that the federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, Mark Butler, has now written to the minister seeking clarity on her commitment to completing this facility, when will the minister's government commence this crucially important project?

##### Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

As I have outlined before, this government has made significant investment in supporting community-based services for adults and children experiencing eating disorders. It is crippling for families. It is a terrible experience, both physically and mentally, for those young people in particular who are experiencing eating disorders. All evidence shows that the best work is done early on and in supporting people in the community. Where we provide support to people in place, in situ, we are able to avoid lengthy hospital stays. That is why this government committed \$31 million to expand the community-based eating disorder treatment program. That is rolling out in south metro and north metro as we speak and supporting people. We also secured just over \$8 million for East Metropolitan Health Service to roll out a similar service. As I have laid out previously, the \$4 million commitment from the member for Canning made at a federal election with absolutely no consultation with the state, did not consider the state's model of care and it did not consider best practice or an evidence-based model of care. A commitment of \$4 million is not enough to pay for the car park. It is not a genuine commitment. I put it to the member for Vasse that that is not a genuine commitment, and I put it to the member for Canning. That is not a genuine commitment to resolve the complex issues affecting the whole family. The member must be privy to correspondence from the federal Minister for Health and Aged Care to me that I have not seen.

**Ms L. Mettam:** You are not working with him?

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** I have never said that he wrote to me. We are in ongoing discussion about how to best use that \$4 million. My preferred approach is for it to be used on evidence-based models of care that we know will support families and get outcomes for people and will not just pay for a building.

#### RESIDENTIAL EATING DISORDER TREATMENT FACILITY

##### 222. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:

I have a supplementary question. The federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, Mark Butler, stated that the allocation of this facility was the Minister for Health's responsibility. Why then has she not given this project the priority it deserves like other states have?

##### Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I think I just explained that; it is because it is not a genuine commitment, Leader of the Liberal Party. The state government has shown its commitment with a \$31 million investment into supporting people with eating disorders and their families. That is our commitment. It is not a commitment that was purely political, made with no consultation and not based on evidence and best practice.

## KIMBERLEY FLOODS — FITZROY RIVER BRIDGE

**223. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the devastation caused by the Kimberley flood event and ex-tropical cyclone Ellie, particularly in the Fitzroy Valley.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government is progressing with the rebuild of a new, more resilient Fitzroy River Bridge?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how community members have responded to this important recovery project?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

I thank the member for Geraldton for that question. I also acknowledge the member for Kimberley, who unfortunately cannot be here with us today, for all her work in supporting the recovery from those devastating floods.

- (1)–(2) Today we marked a major milestone in relation to the replacement of the Fitzroy River Bridge. We have signed a contract with some very experienced operators to begin the reconstruction of that bridge. The contract is with Georgiou Group, BMD Group and BG&E. Today was the execution of the formal alliance agreement. Just to put this into context, it would normally take nine to 12 months to get to this stage through a normal procurement process. We started this procurement process six weeks ago. We have now signed a contract with very, very experienced companies to rebuild the Fitzroy River Bridge. The bridge will be longer, wider and six times stronger than the original bridge. It will be 100 metres longer. As we know, the flood increased the size of the channel to about 270 metres and this bridge will need to cover the entire width of the wider river. The bridge will also be wider with two lanes either way. The new bridge will require 1 200 tonnes of steel together with 4 000 cubic metres of concrete.

Our target is to have some form of traffic operating over this bridge by the middle of next year. After talking to the contractors, we are confident that we can deliver this replacement bridge in that time. To again demonstrate the significant challenge, the existing piers were sunk to about 20 metres into the riverbed. The piers for this new bridge will be sunk to 40 metres to make it stronger to withstand some of that water pressure.

Of course, we have to demolish the existing bridge. Works are underway with the Water Corporation and Telstra in relation to relocating services as soon as possible to then be able to demolish the bridge. We are also working with traditional owners on opportunities for local employment and local businesses. We are also working with them in relation to the construction of a 100-person work camp located in the area to get this job up and going. I thank the federal government for its support so far and all those in industry who are working together. This is a challenging situation, but by working together we will be able to rebuild that bridge. A number of other initiatives are happening already. The barge is operating and the first low-level crossing will be complete, we believe, in the next few weeks. I thank all the workers who have already delivered so much in relation to opening the Willare section of the Great Northern Highway between Derby and Broome. This is another big project. I thank all the traditional owners, the local Kimberley people and the support we have had throughout the Kimberley from people on the ground. They have acknowledged not only the incredible work that has already been done by the government in opening up transport routes, but also the work that is about to commence in replacing that bridge.

## PUBLIC TRUSTEE — FEES

**224. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Attorney General:**

The Western Australian Public Trustee is again in the sights of media with individual cases reflecting the callous treatment of clients by the trustee.

- (1) When does the Attorney General expect to receive the report into the Public Trustee from the Department of Treasury?
- (2) Other than referring the Public Trustee's fees and charges to the Under Treasurer, what is the Attorney General doing about this serious issue?

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY replied:**

- (1)–(2) I will refer to the matter on the *Four Corners* report concerning a person called “Dan”—he was given an anonymised name. I will not mention that case at all in any detail because that is before the State Administrative Tribunal, and, in any event, we never mention anyone who is the subject of a guardianship order for obvious reasons of privacy and the like.

As for the performance of the office of the Public Trustee, there are two inquiries going at the moment and I am awaiting their reports. The first inquiry is by the Auditor General. The member might remember that the Auditor General did an initial inquiry on key performance indicators, and that was tabled in this Parliament. At the conclusion of that inquiry, the Auditor General indicated that she would now

start a second inquiry into the performance on particular files. I am not going to interfere or in any way get involved in that inquiry other than to wait, as the member will wait keenly, the results of the Auditor General's response.

Simultaneously, Treasury and the office of the Public Trustee are looking at and reviewing the fee structure that the office of the Public Trustee charges estates because during the Barnett government—in fact, one of the first things that Premier Barnett did when he came in was to change the fee structure of the Public Trustee. By executive order—it did not come into this Parliament—he ordered that it be a self-funding office, which meant that a lot of vulnerable and poor people whose estates were at the office of the Public Trustee could not pay, so all the Public Trustee could do was to charge those who could pay and come up with a fee structure. That fee structure was put in place by the previous coalition government. The office of the Public Trustee and the Treasury are reviewing all that and the member will no doubt be informed of that review in due course. If the member is asking me if I am going to interfere or get involved in either of those two inquiries, I am telling the member that that would be totally inappropriate conduct by an Attorney General.

#### PUBLIC TRUSTEE — FEES

##### 225. Mr P.J. RUNDLE to the Attorney General:

I have a supplementary question. As the Attorney General well explained, we have myriad inquiries, but what does he say to the family members of clients with the Western Australian Public Trustee who are so incensed by the treatment of their loved ones, that they have had to resort to media publicity to be heard?

##### Mr J.R. QUIGLEY replied:

I did not say myriad inquiries. I said there were two inquiries. One is by the Auditor General and also a review is being conducted by Treasury together with the office of the Public Trustee. I encourage the people who were on that program—I believe the name is Dan or Don; it was anonymised—to raise it with the Auditor General as part of her inquiries.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** That is about the fee model. We want to talk about the treatment of those families.

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** That is what the Auditor General is looking at. Those people can go to the Auditor General and have an independent office holder examine it and report to this Parliament. Thank you very much.

#### ORGANISED CRIME AND OUTLAW MOTORCYCLE GANGS

##### 226. Ms M.M. QUIRK to the Attorney General:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to stopping organised crime and keeping the community safe. Can the Attorney General update the house on how this government's anti-consorting and insignia laws are disrupting organised crime?

##### Mr J.R. QUIGLEY replied:

Certainly. I take the member back to March 2017 when the McGowan government was first elected and the Premier rang and asked me whether I would accept the role of Attorney General. He gave me specific riding orders. He said, "This government is going to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Are you up for that?" In our first term, we introduced laws like the no body, no parole law et cetera.

On the specific question relating to our Criminal Law (Unlawful Consorting and Prohibited Insignia) Act, specifically section 25, which is to do with insignia, when we introduced those laws, I held a press conference with my colleague the Minister for Police. I told the public at that stage that there was no law that would wipe out the bikies. There is no law. The Liberal government tried it. The Liberal government had a boastful Attorney General who stood where I am and said that the government was introducing anti-association laws and that he would run a razor across the back of the bikies and drive them out of town. We know that those laws were so pathetic that the police never used them. We came in and said that we would introduce a raft of laws that would make this the most inhospitable jurisdiction for outlaw motorcycle gangs. I note that yesterday, three Rebels bikies were convicted in the courts under the anti-insignia laws. I do not want to say too much about that case because they are up for sentence on 12 April, but I note that the bikies themselves, on leaving the court, endorsed our laws as the toughest. I will not use their profane language —

**The SPEAKER:** Not if you would like to stay for the rest of question time!

**Mr J.R. QUIGLEY:** I will say one thing about the Rebel bikie Mr Ginn: he has a potty-mouth. He said, "We can't have on our bodies what we want. We can't wear what we want. We can't hang around. Eff this system. I'm not taking off my tattoos. They're staying. We no longer live in a free country." He was really complaining about these laws because they are doing what we promised, which is making this the most inhospitable jurisdiction for bikies. I note that my colleague the member for Warnbro, the Minister for Police, brought in the anti-gun laws and gun prohibition orders. There is a suite of laws, including for the confiscation of assets, and I think we have provided about \$15 million or \$16 million to the Corruption and Crime Commission in the last budget for a deputy CCC

commissioner and new hearing rooms to bring all these people in and strip them of their assets. We have a suite of laws. When they say, “We no longer live in a free country”, how do you like that coming from the bikies? It is coming from the Rebels. We saw Mr Labrook on television being intercepted as he was handing over to Ms Kersley \$250 000, with another \$210 000 in his boot. Not long after that he was put on bail. He was the head of the Rebels but could no longer be the head of the Rebels. He had to pass the baton to Mr Dixon in Bunbury and now he has been arrested on gun and drugs charges.

I would humbly say to the Premier that I have accepted his brief. We are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, and so we shall remain.

**The SPEAKER:** Just a reminder, photography is not permitted in this chamber at all.

#### GOLDFIELDS HIGHWAY

#### 227. Ms M. BEARD to the Minister for Transport:

I refer to the unsealed and unsafe condition of the Goldfields Highway between Wiluna and Meekatharra and a local petition that has garnered nearly 700 signatures calling for action.

- (1) When will the community see the delivery of all works associated with the \$16 million committed by the former coalition government to start sealing this vital transport link?
- (2) Why was the time frame associated with this important project pushed out again?

#### Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

I thank the member for this question.

- (1)–(2) This is an interesting project because the Wiluna–Meekatharra road had not been considered for any upgrades under the previous government. In government, one of the key things we are doing in relation to all our projects, particularly those that are being delivered in areas of significant Aboriginal disadvantage and unemployment, is employing young and local people on that road delivery. I remember going up there a few years ago when we committed \$5 million for the first section of the resealing. Together with the commonwealth government, we have committed further funds. We partnered with a TAFE in Wiluna at that point to employ and train local Aboriginal people on the roads. For some of those projects, this means that projects are not delivered as quickly as they would be if we had a big tier 1 contractor come in and deliver the road, but then we would not have local Aboriginal employment and training. The feedback I got from the local Aboriginal people is that they absolutely want to be part of both the delivery and the maintenance of the road. I remember talking to some of the people who were employed in that road project. They said, “This is our road. We want to be part of building it and maintaining it into the future.” It was one of those times when I was out there and knew that the way we were doing those projects was actually going to make a difference. We are training local people and employing them in the future to maintain the road. We continually work with the local community to see how we can drive local training opportunities and deliver this road to make sure that local people are both engaged and empowered in both road construction and road maintenance.

#### GOLDFIELDS HIGHWAY

#### 228. Ms M. BEARD to the Minister for Transport:

I have a supplementary question. Is there an expected completion date for these important works?

#### Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:

As I said, we have secured funding along the way and we continue to work at providing state funding and trying to achieve federal funding. We are working with local Aboriginal people. It is about the success on the ground of training local people. I think we originally trained about 18 people at the TAFE. Some of them have gone off to other projects because they have been trained in road construction and have been able to secure jobs elsewhere. When I visited Wiluna, I was struck by the many mining operations in that area. We need to make sure that we have better Aboriginal engagement and provide more opportunities for Aboriginal people. I have said in this place many, many times that sometimes that means a road is not constructed as fast as possible, but it means that local people are trained and empowered. The key point for me is maintenance. We do not want to just go in, build the road and disappear. It is about making sure that the local people actually own the road, in every sense, and are also empowered to be there and can protect and maintain the road into the future.

#### EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS — REFORM

#### 229. Mr M. HUGHES to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government’s emergency department reform program providing long-term emergency care reforms.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how these reforms are addressing the systemic causes of ambulance ramping, including through new initiatives such as virtual emergency departments?



- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this initiative builds on our actions to reform emergency departments and put patients first?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

I thank the member for Kalamunda for his question and for his interest in older adults, aged care and ageing in place.

- (1)–(2) This strategy supports our older Western Australians. Last year when I delivered my first major speech as Minister for Health to *Business News*, I said that we cannot afford to keep turning to emergency departments to solve all our problems; the rest of the system needed to be fully functioning. Currently our system is based on a “all roads lead to the emergency department” philosophy, which just has to change. Other states have had great success with virtual emergency departments. Victoria’s Northern Health virtual ED recently got funding to double its capacity from the Victorian state government.

I am pleased to say that health service providers have begun this journey over the last couple of years supported by funding from the government. Virtual emergency medicine at Fiona Stanley Hospital, initially funded in the 2021–22 budget and expanded in last year’s budget, enables paramedics to videoconference with physicians and divert patients from ED to go directly to a ward, imaging or timely outpatient care. The Co-HIVE—community health in a virtual environment—at the East Metropolitan Health Service uses the world-leading HIVE program to deliver remote monitoring, virtual geriatric care and a multidisciplinary in-reach into aged-care facilities. The emergency care navigation centres at the North Metropolitan Health Service funded in the midyear review supports patients to reach the most appropriate care as quickly as they can, such as quick access to specialists through the rapid access clinic program.

What is new is that through the ministerial task force on ramping, we have pulled these programs together as a system-wide strategy that works as a system. We will then evaluate all those programs and essentially scale-up the most successful or best parts to become a system-wide approach and allow people to get the right care at the right time in the right place. The vision of WAVED—WA virtual emergency departments—is to get away from “all roads lead to emergency departments”. This will allow, particularly this winter, aged-care facilities to have a safe optional alternative to calling an ambulance, in which they get a consultant on the phone straightaway to talk to a nurse on site or to talk to a facility on site and give immediate medical advice on how to manage their patient, and joint decision-making on the best thing for that patient. This is a great way forward.

The first stage is that hospital service providers and St John Ambulance will trial new models of virtual emergency care focused on frail and older adults in the South Metropolitan Health Service. East will build on its Co-HIVE model, north will deliver its emergency care navigation centre, and we are also piloting the My Emergency Visit app and the emergency care navigation centre to support patients more generally to expedite their care through the emergency department. It may be that the advice is to come later in the day when it is not at peak demand, and that patient can be seen more quickly if that is clinically appropriate and is decided by the doctor at the time he sees the patient.

We know that older adults are an important cohort. They are also one of our biggest cohorts in hospitals. Currently, given the challenges in aged care in attracting the right skills mix, the only option is to call an ambulance. Many families and residents do not want to end up in an ambulance and going through an ED. This is a more comfortable journey for them; most appropriately, it is a more comfortable and appropriate journey for them. It will avoid potential hospital-based decline, which is common in older people in hospital; it will improve bed block; and, significantly, we hope and anticipate that it will have some impact on ramping, given that over 50 per cent of ramping hours are ambulances with older adults in them. Many of them just need access to a specialist or care as quickly as possible, but they do not necessarily need emergency medicine.

These are some of the many ideas and solutions that have come from clinicians on the floor—those who are passionate about making our system functional and supporting people as best we can. This government is committed to funding those ideas, putting them in place and backing in the staff on the ground to support our community.

HORIZON POWER — WEST AUSTRALIAN ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

**230. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Energy:**

Yesterday the minister announced that Horizon Power had acquired a 50 per cent interest in West Australian Alternative Energy. The press release announced that the joint venture claimed this partnership would support the government’s target of an 80 per cent reduction in carbon emission by 2030.

- (1) How was this joint venture relationship chosen?
- (2) Why did Horizon Power not simply enter into a normal power supply agreement with WAAE to achieve the same outcome?
- (3) Is it the case that the government’s participation in the JV simply provides WAAE with an unfair competitive advantage over other potential energy suppliers?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:**

(1)–(3) Horizon Power came to me with some problems over the last period of time. The first was the question of purchasing batteries. A massive global effort to reduce carbon emissions is causing supply chain challenges, and Horizon Power's purchases of batteries are not sufficiently large to attract the attention of international battery companies. Therefore, it is actually buying its batteries in conjunction with Synergy, because otherwise it would get no bids for the supply of batteries. Unfortunately, because of the great success we have seen since the change of federal government, where we now have a federal government that is as strongly supportive of decarbonisation efforts as the Western Australian government, that also means that the technical capacity of people to bid for projects is changing. There are a lot more large projects and, again, Horizon Power is finding that companies will not bid for the work it needs done. To solve that problem, Horizon Power approached me to see whether the government would approve a JV with a Western Australian business that would allow Horizon to have a guarantee that it would have someone to do its renewable energy projects.

There followed a rigorous due diligence process that included Treasury analysis and work by the State Solicitor's Office and Energy Policy WA, and a thoroughgoing review that took into account all questions relating to competitive neutrality. I note that Horizon already has a JV called Boundary Power with a company called Ampcontrol that supplies standalone power systems. The question of competitive neutrality was one of the issues looked at. However, I must emphasise that the problem for Horizon is not who it would choose, but rather that it needed to have somebody to bid for the work. We cannot have the important work being done by Horizon Power compromised, particularly as we roll out the regularisation of electricity supply in remote Aboriginal communities—a very, very critical program that is overcoming the previous Liberal–National government's lack of attention to remote Aboriginal communities when it was in power. It spent no money from royalties for regions, just as an example, in remote Aboriginal communities. We have to overcome that history of neglect and we have to make sure that that supply is delivered. When there is market failure, we get government intervention, and that is exactly what we have done.

HORIZON POWER — WEST AUSTRALIAN ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

**231. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Energy:**

I have a supplementary question. How does the minister expect us to believe that Horizon Power cannot get companies to bid for its projects when private companies have told us that they are anxious for that work?

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON replied:**

The reason the member can believe that is that is what Horizon Power explained to me. There is a process under the Electricity Corporations Act 2005 that is called section 70; that is, when energy companies want to take a new policy approach, they have to seek the agreement of the responsible minister. That is a rigorous process led by Energy Policy WA, but includes advice from at least Treasury and, in this case, also from the State Solicitor's Office. It was used when we created Boundary Power, which again is exactly the same structure in which Horizon holds a 50 per cent share in the JV, and it is being used in this case as well. The commercial agreement that Horizon has entered into is entirely appropriate and, as I say, we do not want to have a situation in which Horizon continues to have projects for which there are no bids, because we want to make sure that Aboriginal and remote communities are looked after. As I said, I understand that the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party were not prepared to support remote Aboriginal communities. Not a single cent of royalties for regions money was spent on those 108 communities. They are the 108 communities that the Liberal and National Parties wanted to close.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please! There are people here who may not like what the minister is saying, but he is entitled to say it. He is coming to the conclusion of his supplementary answer. As for government members, he does not require your support.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** These are the communities that the Liberal and National Parties wanted to close. Not one cent of royalties for regions money was spent in those communities, despite the billions of dollars that were sloshed through. It is time that the Liberal and National Parties let the government get on and deliver the services that we are delivering for those communities.

TARGET 120 — NEWMAN AND CARNARVON

**232. Mr K.J.J. MICHEL to the Minister for Community Services:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to ensuring at-risk young people are supported in their communities.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the expansion of Target 120 to Newman and Carnarvon will work in partnership with other measures to keep the community safe?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this early intervention program will assist in steering at-risk youth away from the criminal justice system?

**Ms S.E. WINTON replied:**

I thank the member for Pilbara for the question.

- (1)–(2) There is no question that the cycle of youth offending in some of our regional areas is simply unsustainable. It is also a sad fact that many of the underlying issues are not recent; they have been a long time in the making over many, many generations, and solutions will not be achieved overnight. But absolutely what will work is when communities work together. It takes all parts of the community, it takes all levels of government and it takes a sustained effort from all involved. As a former teacher in some of the most remote parts of the state, I know that to be true. Programs work best when they are led by community and supported by community to work locally.

I recently had the opportunity to visit both Newman, with the member for Pilbara, and Carnarvon. As members know, Carnarvon in particular has attracted attention for antisocial behaviour. I had some really productive meetings with local police, the shire president and, most importantly, local staff from the Department of Communities. I listened to them and heard of the incredible work they are doing in trying to work within their communities to solve really challenging problems. Overwhelmingly, I heard that alcohol abuse in Carnarvon is undeniably the key driver that gets in the way of people doing important work with children and families.

I commend the director of Liquor Licensing's recent proposal for stringent liquor restrictions in Carnarvon. It is simply unacceptable that alcohol-related crime is 16.2 times higher in Carnarvon than in the Perth metropolitan area. It is simply unacceptable that alcohol-related family assaults are eight times higher than in the Perth metropolitan area. Liquor restrictions, including strengthening the banned drinkers register, is one important approach, but of course we know that will only buy us some time to allow people in places such as Carnarvon to do the important work they do. At the crux of supporting these people are the early intervention strategies. Early intervention is the key to long-term solutions. Members have heard me talk about programs such as Target 120, which addresses youth crime at an individual level before young people's lives spiral out of control. Newman and Carnarvon are now the latest towns to join the Target 120 program. This program has a proven track record, with around half of participants not having future contact with the juvenile justice system. We know it works. In fact, since 2018 we have invested \$31.5 million to roll out Target 120 around the state, with an additional \$11 million in the last budget to roll it out to nine additional sites.

It was a pleasure to join the member for Pilbara during my visit to Newman, where we announced that the Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa Aboriginal Corporation had been appointed to run this program in Newman. KJ has already been running amazing on-country trips that have generated transformative change across Martu communities. This is the exact type of local service provider that we need and want to support in driving that change in communities. I want to acknowledge KJ corporation and the time it gave me to share some of the important work that it is doing with its communities and how excited it is to be supported through Target 120 to keep going with the work that it knows will work to make a difference in young people's lives.

Yesterday, I met with Ngala to announce that it had been appointed to deliver Target 120 in Carnarvon. Our community youth officer, Harmony Gould, an incredible local champion, has been working with an interagency group to identify suitable young people who will benefit from this program, and of course their families, while arrangements were being finalised to announce the service provider. Ngala is doing incredible work right around the state and has done an extraordinary job in Carnarvon around a number of services, so it is well placed to do that work in Carnarvon. I also met Reynold, who will be working with Ngala as part of the Target 120 program. He is a local Carnarvon person. That is absolutely critical because at the heart of Target 120 is engaging with young people and building up their trust so that people like Reynold who are involved in running the program can support them to build an individualised plan that they are committed to. We can provide supports around that individualised plan so that those young people can turn their lives around. I know that Ngala will do a great job in Carnarvon because it partners with MEEDAC in Geraldton to run Target 120 in Geraldton, so it has great experience and it understands what is at the heart of Target 120.

Rolling out these programs to Carnarvon and Newman is a strong specific example of how the McGowan Labor government is focused on early intervention as the long-term solution for what are challenging problems throughout the region.

**The SPEAKER:** I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition with the last question.

**JURIEN BAY BOAT HARBOUR**

**233. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Transport:**

I refer to the Jurien Bay marina and the engineering solution for this ongoing environmental disaster, a solution for which the minister has been unsuccessful in funding from either the state or federal governments.

- (1) Has the minister had revised costings for this project since its design and costings three years ago?
- (2) Has the minister reiterated calls for funding for this project with the federal government and with the state Treasurer; Premier?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

- (1)–(2) We have enormous infrastructure demands across the state, and they continue. I am not sure whether the costs have been updated, but I do know that we did some dredging in the harbour over the past six months and we will continually monitor the situation. The state is big and there are enormous demands across the state. We have a record amount of spending in our transport program, we continue to roll out a number of initiatives across the state and we will continue to monitor all the demands for marinas, harbours and other maritime infrastructure across the state. We will continue to work systematically through the priorities and hope to secure funding and also dredge when needed.

#### JURIEN BAY BOAT HARBOUR

**234. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Transport:**

I have a supplementary question. How many fish kills will it take before it is forced onto the minister's agenda?

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please, members!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI replied:**

As I said, there is demand in many places across the state. As I travel across the state, I am not sure what the Nationals WA did for eight and a half years with those royalties for regions funds.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** No.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The Nationals had eight and a half years. There is so much unmet demand around the state in my portfolio, whether it be port developments, maritime developments or roads. There is enormous demand across the state. The member cannot argue that we are not spending a lot on transport in this state. We are spending a record amount. We continue to monitor all the demands and all the priorities to make sure that we can deliver for the entire state.

**The SPEAKER:** That concludes question time.

#### RESIDENTIAL EATING DISORDER TREATMENT FACILITY

##### *Question without Notice 221 — Supplementary Information*

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health)** [2.49 pm]: I rise under standing order 82A to provide further factual information in relation to a question asked today by the Leader of the Liberal Party. The former federal coalition government provided \$56 million to Queensland to build eating disorder centres. The *Four Corners* story of 27 February did not mention Western Australia or the Peel facility and was primarily focused on Queensland. The question directed to the Minister for Health was focused on the Queensland facility. I suggest that the Leader of the Liberal Party verify the questions that are written for her.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please! That further information bordered on debate. I caution ministers about the misuse of that standing order.

**Ms L. Mettam:** Misleading.

**The SPEAKER:** No. That is even more inappropriate, and you did not even wait for me to finish commenting. As I said, that concludes question time.

#### GOLD CORPORATION — ONE-FUTURE PROGRAM AND STAFF

##### *Question on Notice 689 — Answer Advice*

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [2.51 pm]: I rise under standing order 80(2) to seek from the Minister for Mines and Petroleum an answer to question on notice 689, which is overdue.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Mines and Petroleum)** [2.51 pm]: I apologise for not having completed the answer. I will get it to the Leader of the Opposition as soon as possible.

**HEALTH — STAFF — SICK DAYS**  
**HEALTH — CODE YELLOW**  
**HEALTH — PSYCHIATRIC LIAISON NURSE — BUSSELTON HEALTH CAMPUS**

*Questions on Notice 642, 643 and 665 — Answer Advice*

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [2.51 pm]: I rise under standing order 80(2) to seek answers from the Minister for Health for questions on notice 642, 643 and 665, which are overdue.

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health)** [2.51 pm]: I will endeavour to have those answers as quickly as I can.

**WORKERS COMPENSATION AND INJURY MANAGEMENT BILL 2023**  
**WORKERS COMPENSATION AND INJURY MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2023**

*Second Reading — Cognate Debate*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

*Visitor — Chris White*

**The SPEAKER:** Just before I give the call to the member for Collie–Preston, I acknowledge in my gallery Mr Chris White, who I used to work with at the department of occupational health and safety. Welcome!

*Debate Resumed*

**MS J.L. HANNS (Collie–Preston — Parliamentary Secretary)** [2.52 pm]: I believe that I have one minute left to conclude my contribution. In summary, I absolutely support the bills—unequivocally. We have all had problems putting our teeth in today! I want to place on the record that Miss Higgins’ chewing gum policy was never, and would never have been, implemented in the classroom; I just wanted to clarify that. For those members who were not in the chamber for that part of my contribution, certainly it will be in *Hansard*. I finalise my contribution by saying that I commend the bills to the house.

**MS E.L. HAMILTON (Joondalup)** [2.53 pm]: Today I rise to make a contribution to the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 and the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Amendment Bill 2023 and to speak on the important topic of workers compensation in Western Australia. As elected representatives, it is our duty to ensure that the workers of Western Australia are protected and supported when they suffer workplace injuries or illnesses. This bill, which has been in development for several years, is finally ready for discussion and debate. The bill represents a significant step forward in improving the state of workers compensation in our state, and I commend the Minister for Industrial Relations for his work in bringing this bill to the house.

Addressing the concerns of working people is a priority for this Labor government. These are not extraordinary reforms; we are not taking the system apart and rebuilding it. Rather, these reforms seek to modernise the legislation and implement the recommendations of the *Review of the Workers’ Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981: Final report*.

This bill is part of the government’s pieces of high-priority legislation, some of which we introduced in 2018 shortly after forming government. The workers compensation reforms that we introduced were about increasing entitlements and better supporting the dependants of people who die in work-related accidents. Those measures were built on with the 2020 COVID-19 reforms that removed the common-law termination day. We are now keeping the promises that we made to Western Australians at the 2021 election. This bill will fulfil a number of commitments made at that election to rewrite the Workers’ Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981 and make it relevant to the twenty-first century. In rewriting the bill, we will create truly modern legislation that is easy to understand and implement, which will provide those who access the scheme with clarity and certainty as they navigate their workers compensation claim and the process surrounding that claim. This is so important because devastating workplace injuries are already hugely stressful events and we do not need to compound that stress with challenging 30-year-old legislation.

The bill will double the cap on medical expenses, which means that seriously injured workers who need more complex surgery or long hospital stays to recover will receive more financial support to cover their medical treatment than they do now. The rewritten legislation will see an increase in recompensed medical and health expenses from 30 per cent to 60 per cent. The capped amount, which will be indexed annually, will rise from approximately \$73 000 to \$146 000. It is only fair that a seriously injured worker who needs increased inpatient care is not left out of pocket in their pursuit of a full recovery.

The bill will extend the step-down point from 13 weeks to 26 weeks. This extension will double the period that weekly income compensation is paid. On top of this, the bill will preserve a safety net amount so that the step-down payment will not be less than a worker’s base award rate, plus any regular extra income they earned in the 12 months prior to their injury. This is particularly relevant for labourers and community and personnel service workers, including care workers and machinery operators and drivers. This is because Safe Work Australia consistently finds that these three occupations have the highest rates of serious claims that require a long recovery period. Workers

in these occupations are often on base award rates of pay and may rely on overtime or additional shifts for extra income. Extending the step-down point and maintaining the safety net minimum level will have a huge impact on those workers.

Our amendments will also prohibit employer attendance at medicals appointments. It seems highly unusual that an outsider would attend a medical consultation while someone is being examined by a medical practitioner. This bill will prohibit that anomaly from continuing so that an employer or agent is not able to influence the outcome of a doctor's determination as to whether a person's medical condition could have resulted from the incident that they reported. WorkCover WA's guidelines for general practitioners state that it is not the treating doctor's role to determine whether a worker has a valid claim under the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981; rather, the GP's opinion should be limited to whether the medical condition could have resulted from the incident reported by the worker. WorkCover WA acknowledges that it is important that doctors communicate with employers about the management of an injured worker. This bill will maintain the ability for doctors to engage with employers to best manage an injured worker's return to work on appropriate duties. It is completely inappropriate for a boss or supervisor to attend a medical appointment with a worker. That practice must come to an end in matters like this.

These first three updated provisions will deliver on the key commitments made prior to the 2021 state election. The government has also proposed a number of other amendments to address the points raised in the review of legislation, including lifetime care and assistance for those who have suffered catastrophic workplace injuries. In 2016, a no-fault catastrophic injury support scheme for motor vehicle accidents was implemented in Western Australia. This has been incredibly impactful on people across the community by supporting those with catastrophic injuries and giving them the care they need. This bill will allow an extension to the scope of that scheme to include catastrophically injured workers who have had a compensable workers compensation claim. This means that workers who suffer catastrophic injuries at work may receive lifetime care and support specific to their needs. Workers who are catastrophically injured will still be able to pursue common-law legal avenues for damages should they prefer that option.

The bill will require provisional compensation payments for pending claims to help achieve expeditious determinations in deferred claims while enabling workers to receive financial assistance even if the investigation by insurers extends for a long duration. Workers should not be left out of pocket because of the processes that can occur between government agencies, insurance companies and employers.

Finally, this legislation will prevent discrimination in pre-employment screening. I am sure many of us would have completed pre-employment forms that included questions on whether we had lodged a workers compensation claim before. That will be a thing of the past, as the bill will outlaw employers and recruitment agencies asking about previous claims. This important matter has been raised by a number of members in this place. It means that anyone who has made a claim in the past is not vulnerable to being seen as an undesirable candidate for a position. Written into this bill is a provision that prevents any person from disclosing information about someone else's previous claim, when it relates to pre-employment screening.

I take a moment now to reflect on what has happened in the past. Western Australia passed workers compensation legislation for the first time in 1902. It was introduced by Premier Sir Walter James with the enthusiastic support of what was then a young Labor Party. In fact, the legislation would not have become law without the advocacy of the Labor Party and the trade union movement. Back in 1901, when this legislation was first debated, the member for Murray, William George, MLA, argued that the implementation of workers compensation would doom development in this state by overburdening employers. He and other conservatives in this place said that the previous arrangements were perfectly acceptable, and that injured workers should just apply for charity. Mr George said the following about the bill —

In my opinion we are getting hag-ridden with legislation. It appears to be almost a crime to be an employer. Most of those who bring forward legislation of this character are certainly never likely to understand either the position or the duties of an employer. Many of them have had very little employment themselves, for very obvious reasons, and do not seem to understand anything beyond what might be comprised within the four corners of a sheet of note-paper.

We then did not, and we now do not, accept this sentiment. It is not a crime to be an employer. Employers and small business owners are the linchpins of our state and they deserve our support. Every worker should be able to come home safe and our laws should support such an expectation. Compensation for injuries obtained at work is a right that we will continue to defend and reinforce, 121 years later, including with this legislation.

Our legislation is good for business and good for employers. By rewriting the act for 2023, we are ensuring that all language and provisions are up-to-date and easily interpretable for everyone. By clarifying and updating key provisions, we are helping to make sure businesses are aware of their obligations and are able to implement the necessary business planning to support their employees. Updating this legislation for the twenty-first century will make it easier for small business owners. It will also provide more certainty to their employees that they will be covered by right, and in the event of an incident, their families will be supported.

The 1902 bill was significant legislation, as WA was only the second jurisdiction in Australia to implement workers compensation. South Australia, and our friends across the seas in New Zealand, both created schemes in 1900. It would also be a long time until the federal government took action on this matter, with federal legislation coming in 1912. Over the next 79 years, various complex amendments were tacked onto the legislation, which necessitated its consolidation and modern rewriting as the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981. In 2023 we are faced with a similar situation, and updates to this act are now required for similar reasons: it is the job of good governments to streamline and improve legislation so that it serves its purpose effectively. When it was first passed in 1981, the act contained 175 sections and was 155 pages long. It now contains 375 sections and is 419 pages long. Since the 1981 act, a vast number of changes have occurred in Australia's economic and employment landscape and the role and scope of the industrial relations system. There has been a massive improvement in medical treatments and rehabilitation options and, quite frankly, the way we go about our day-to-day lives, as people and as governments. As we tackle the digital space, the world is far away from what it was in the early 1980s. This is important for a matter such as workers compensation, which is critical in everybody's lives.

These changes will not only benefit injured workers, but also help to create a more efficient and effective workers compensation system overall. I take this opportunity to thank all stakeholders who have been involved in the development of this bill, including the trade unions, employer groups and legal professionals. Extensive consultation was undertaken, including 86 submissions on a consultation of the draft bill over a four-month submission period in late 2021. Those contributions have been invaluable in ensuring that this bill reflects the needs and concerns of all parties.

Workers compensation is by no means a substitute for workplace safety. Tragically, the start of 2023 was marked by a series of workplace incidents that demonstrate the need for improved workplace safety to prevent injury, and a framework to support adequate compensation for any injuries that occur. I am proud that our Labor government has already updated the work health and safety framework and made industrial manslaughter a crime in this state. That bill put stronger penalties in place for employers who contribute to a worker's death, and now this legislation seeks to support those who experience non-fatal incidents in the workplace. In supporting the workers compensation bill, we are taking an important step towards creating a fairer and more effective workers compensation system for the people of Western Australia. I commend the bill to the house.

**MS C.M. TONKIN (Churchlands)** [3.05 pm]: I rise to speak in support of the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 and the Workers Compensation and Injury Management Amendment Bill 2023 cognate debate. The purposes of this bill are to make employers liable to compensate workers who suffer injuries from employment; to establish a scheme for compulsory insurance against that liability; to provide for the management of those injuries; to provide for the resolution of disputes; to make administrative and other related provisions; and to make consequential and related amendments to various laws, including the Fire and Emergency Services Act 1998, the Insurance Commission of Western Australia Act 1986, the Motor Vehicle (Catastrophic Injuries) Act 2016, the Motor Vehicle (Third Party Insurance) Act 1943, the Police (Medical and Other Expenses for Former Officers) Act 2008 and the Police Act 1892. I did not realise that we still had a current police act from 1892!

As many of my colleagues noted, Minister Hon Bill Johnston has made an enormous, outstanding and far-reaching contribution as Minister for Industrial Relations. The Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill is an exemplar of the thorough approach of this minister to the policy and legislation of which he is the steward. The bill has had a long gestation and is the result of extensive consultation with stakeholders. It is therefore a thoroughly well-considered reform.

It would seem that the higher the risk of injury in a workplace, the more prominence is given to achieving a safe working environment. In my lifetime I have seen considerable changes in workplace awareness and focus on workers' safety. There has been a significant cultural shift whereby increasingly everyone in workplaces is or should be interested in safety. Worker safety is a core value of unions and their dedication to identifying and seeking to have unsafe work practices and environments addressed is rightly unrelenting, as is their advocacy for reform of workers compensation and injury management. Their input into the framing of this legislation is therefore acknowledged.

The story related by my good colleague the member for Cockburn resonated with my personal experience of working with noxious chemicals when pregnant. My first degree included a major in statistics, and my first job after graduating was as a research assistant. My job involved gathering and supporting the analysis of data for a project involving a wheat trial. Eventually, part of that work involved counting the florets on the heads of wheat that had been stored in formaldehyde. The smell of formaldehyde made me feel nauseous. As I was pregnant, I was very concerned about the potential effects on my unborn child of exposure to that chemical, especially when I started to experience some difficulties with my pregnancy. I was given no information about how to safely work with formaldehyde or about the implications for my health of working with that chemical. As contact with formaldehyde was part of the job, I thought the only choice I had was to resign. Perhaps today there would be other options for me, as there were for the woman whom the member for Cockburn mentioned during his contribution to this debate. It was, however, a good decision for me to leave the role when I did, because I did not know what effect the exposure was having. I am glad I never had to navigate a workers compensation claim in that regard, as this experience even predated the Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981.

Internationally, I have worked in many unsafe workplaces, including in Afghanistan, Sudan and Papua New Guinea. Fortunately, for the most part, I escaped any workplace injury or health-related issues, except for my experience in a peacekeeping mission in Sudan. The mission in which I worked, UNAMID, served the Darfur region of Sudan—the far western region; it is in the middle of the Sahara Desert. My work there included times when our peacekeeping troops came under attack and were killed; when colleagues were kidnapped; and when a devastating fire broke out at night, destroying a storage facility and part of a hospital in the guarded compound in which I lived. That was extraordinarily frightening, because I could hear what I thought was gunfire. I thought we were under attack. There were troops running everywhere around the container in which I lived. It was not until I dared to look out the door that I saw that it was actually a fire, and I was advised that the reason for what sounded like gunfire was batteries exploding in a warehouse facility.

As a result of my work at UNAMID, I experienced what I regard as mild post-traumatic stress disorder. I have an emotional reaction to weapons and am driven to flee situations that I perceive are potentially violent. I cannot watch violent movies or television and had a meltdown when my Canadian stepson was checking his weapons before going out on patrol as a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer in the Yukon. The RCMP officers at that stage patrolled by themselves and had to carry quite a significant weapon to be able to easily bring down a grizzly bear, because there were often encounters between people and grizzly bears. However, the sight of those weapons was a little bit more than I could stand. As an aside, I add here that my stepson has been one of those who pushed for the unionisation of the RCMP. I was staggered to know that the members of the RCMP were not represented by a union until very recently. Having achieved that goal in recent years, my stepson continues to advocate as a union member and representative for better and safer working conditions for his RCMP colleagues, including for those suffering with PTSD. Brian was given an award by the Governor General of Canada for his meritorious service concerning work with veterans suffering with PTSD. He was an army reservist who went into the RCMP but continued his work among veterans. Brian Harding, in my estimation, is an inspiration.

In this place, I had to restrain myself from fleeing the chamber when shown a video about a hypothetical intruder during my induction. I am very grateful to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Ms Kirsten Robinson, who now understands my circumstances and warns me of situations that I might perceive as threatening or violent, including emergency drills. There is no question of me seeking any form of workers compensation based on the mild PTSD I experience; I was compensated with the payment of danger money for working at the peacekeeping mission. However, I am pleased to note that under this legislation, PTSD will be recognised as a workplace illness for which workers compensation is available. It is especially important to note that PTSD will be presumed to be work-related for ambulance workers.

I have a son who works in the building and construction industry. I fully appreciate the workplace hazards that arise in his industry, including risks associated with working at heights, dust inhalation, injuries associated with using equipment, falls, crush injuries, eye injuries et cetera. Mercifully, he has never had any serious injury. I think that is really attributable to my son being well schooled in and obsessive about construction site safety. However, as the member for Victoria Park highlighted, the construction industry makes up 20 per cent of workers compensation claims in this state. In fact, during 2021–22, a total of \$1.07 billion was paid for workers compensation claims. Of that amount, \$960 million, or 89.9 per cent, was paid for the benefit of workers, with 68.4 per cent of payments made directly to workers in the form of income payments and common-law and lump sum settlements; 21.5 per cent of payments made for treatment services, such as medical, allied health and workplace rehabilitation services; and the remaining 10.1 per cent of payments related to legal expenses.

The quality of the management of claims is crucial for those who suffer workplace injuries. This bill will improve the ways in which the scheme will impact on them. Being injured at work is bad enough, but adding to that trauma through difficulties with workers compensation claims is avoidable through the proper management of the process, as set out in this bill.

This bill is a complete rewrite of workers compensation legislation and is largely a technical exercise. It is underpinned by some key and important improvements to worker entitlements and elements of the workers compensation scheme. The principles that have guided the drafting process make to this legislation a modern act are really important. There has been restructuring and reordering of the parts in a logical sequence commencing with the most fundamental aspects of the workers compensation scheme, including coverage, compensation and injury management. Related concepts have been grouped by part or division. Renumbering all sections has also been undertaken with no gaps between numbers or letter references in section numbers. Improvements to readability have been made with the use of a modernised drafting style. Wording of provisions has been clarified to ensure they are legally sound and easily understood. There is greater clarity and consistency in the usage of fundamental terms like “worker,” “injury,” “injury from employment” and “incapacity”. Notes are used to convey important information about a provision, particularly when the provision references another provision or another act. The improvements will also provide an appropriate balance of matters provided for in the act and in regulations. This is very important because being able to make certain changes or updates through regulations will add flexibility and improve the timeliness with which changes can be made. The principal and all related acts have also been repealed and savings and transitional provisions to make a seamless transition to a single new act are being used.



There are many key policy, technical and administrative changes as part of the modernisation of the act. These include clarifying the status of contractors in the definition of “worker” and providing flexibility for regulations to extend cover to persons doing work in the gig economy and other non-conventional employment arrangements if the circumstances justify it in the future. The gig economy has become such an integral part of our society. For those workers who are very vulnerable, the ability to come within the orbit of this act is very important. The changes will also clarify the presumption of work-related injury for workers suffering dust disease, including silicosis, and streamlining provisions for how dust disease compensation and common-law claims are made and determined. That is a very important aspect of this bill.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Ms C.M. TONKIN:** Amending the Limitation Act 2005 to ensure workers with silicosis are on the same footing as workers with asbestosis is another important measure to promote consistency between like workplace diseases. Unfortunately for those who suffer asbestosis, the problems can arise even decades after the exposure to asbestos. Likewise with silicosis, the evidence of illness arising from exposure to silica can take many years. Facilitating the updating of the list of diseases presumed to be work related through regulations is, as I have said, an extremely important part of this bill. This is a particularly significant provision because it will allow greater flexibility to recognise more diseases that are presumed work related in a timely manner. We will not have to wait for an amendment to the act for this to occur, so there will be flexibility as understanding of diseases that can be presumed work related are better understood. This is a particularly significant provision. The member for Landsdale mentioned in this context the potential for the future inclusion of female diseases to which women firefighters may be at risk.

The bill will also provide for catastrophically injured workers to receive lifetime care and support under the catastrophic injuries support scheme administered by the Insurance Commission of Western Australia. There will be simplification of the method for calculating income compensation payments. This kind of clarity will help everybody to understand how the guts of the legislation—the guts of compensation claims—will work for individuals. Extending the period from 13 to 26 weeks before income compensation payments step down, and increasing the cap on medical and health expenses compensation from 30 per cent to 60 per cent of the general maximum amount are both 2021 McGowan government election commitments. Improving insurer liability decision time frames, including the requirement to make provisional payments to workers when a liability decision is not given in time, will make for greater peace of mind and certainty for affected workers. It will also provide an incentive to speed up decision-making concerning liability decisions. The legislation will also clarify and provide more flexibility in settlement pathways.

Again, this is a modernising bill that will make the administration and understanding of the legislation easier for all concerned. Clear provisions and processes for discontinuing, reducing or suspending compensation payments are another feature, as is recognising the role and functions of the worker’s treating medical practitioner and the right of workers to choose their treating medical practitioner. If someone is injured or has a health issue, they need the confidence to be able to go to their own health practitioner and trust them and their knowledge of the person to make judgements about medical decisions following a workplace injury. Prohibiting employer attendance when a worker is being physically or clinically examined by their treating medical practitioner was also a 2021 Labor government election commitment. It is a further enhancement of the dignity with which people will be treated. When someone is injured, they may lose their self-confidence or they may be physically affected. Anything that can bolster their self-confidence and dignity in this process is important.

Under the legislation, there will be consolidation of safety net funds for claims associated with uninsured employers, insolvent insurers and self-insurers, and terrorism events. These are all extremely important features of the legislation. Providing modernised frameworks for WorkCover WA to licence, approve and regulate service providers is a critical feature. It is an attestation to the quality of services that are provided to injured workers. Discontinuing the regulatory framework for registered agents who represent WorkCover parties in Western Australia’s conciliation and arbitration services is yet another streamlining feature of this legislation that adds confidence to its administration, as well as updating fines and penalties for offences under the act. These are all very important features of this legislation, some of which were McGowan Labor government election commitments, others necessary changes to modernise the administration of the act. But they all come together in what is a very well considered piece of legislation that will have far-reaching and beneficial impacts on injured workers who seek compensation.

As for the cost impacts, only marginal increases to the scheme costs and premium rates are associated with the improved entitlements resulting from the 2021 McGowan government’s election commitments to increase the medical and health expenses cap, to extend the income compensation step-down point and to enhance entitlements for catastrophic workplace injuries. In an actuarial assessment, PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated a 2.83 per cent increase in premium rates resulting from these changes, which is fair, reasonable and affordable for employers, and a reasonable level of additional cost to the economy in general.

This Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 reflects Labor values and incorporates the commitments of the McGowan Labor government. For this reason, I am proud to stand in support and commend this bill to the house.

**MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington — Minister for Industrial Relations)** [3.32 pm] — in reply: I am pleased to speak in conclusion to this second reading debate. I want to thank all the members who spoke in the debate. The Workers Compensation and Injury Management Bill 2023 is a very important piece of legislation. The member for Cottesloe, on behalf of the opposition—the shadow Minister for Industrial Relations is in the other house—asked some questions and I will talk about those in a minute. I want to thank the members for Hillarys, Bassendean, Bateman, Victoria Park, Riverton, Cockburn, Willagee, Mirrabooka, Landsdale, Southern River, Nedlands, Collie–Preston, Joondalup and Churchlands—I do not think I missed anybody—for bringing their perspectives to this discussion on what is very important legislation.

I will pick up something that the member for Churchlands referenced: the reinsurance for terrorism events. That was one of the issues that led to a significant amount of conversation in the targeted consultation on the drafting of the bill. If one thinks about it, there are three sets of interests here: the interest of the working people who are making claims, the interest of the employers who are insuring themselves against those claims, and then, of course, the interests of the insurance companies who are trying to manage those claims. Terrorism is one of those parts of the legislation that is effectively government underwriting because a single act of terrorism could lead to hundreds of claims, and, therefore, the insurance companies want to limit their liability. It is actually one of the issues that took a lot of discussion and conversation to get it in the form that we wanted here.

I want to emphasise that apart from the specific areas that were 2021 election commitments, this legislation is not about improving the benefits under the workers compensation scheme. Some critics say that we have not gone far enough along that path of improving the circumstances for working people under this legislation. My second reading speech and the commentary of many members described the long gestation of this bill starting in 2009 or 2008 through to now. Indeed, I think we put out a media release in July 2017 to say that we had approved the drafting of the legislation, so it took nearly six years to get the legislation even after it was approved for drafting. That partly reflects the challenge of getting legislation drafted, but it is also the fact that this has been an incredibly consultative process. There was consultation with the review, arising from the review and arising from the drafting instructions. There was also consultation with the draft bill. The member for Cottesloe made a comment about how he had not had anyone in industry pushing back against the bill, but I think that is because we did, in fact, go through an unbelievably detailed consultation process, including on the bill as drafted. I think it is something like version 23 or 24 that is actually being presented in Parliament, which just shows the level of conversation that we have had on this legislation.

Before I talk about anybody else, I want to specifically mention the member for Mirrabooka, who completely underplayed her involvement in how we got to this point, first as an Australian Services Union official and later as the secretary of UnionsWA. Her leadership has been an important contribution for the union movement in getting this legislation before the Parliament. I acknowledge Owen Whittle, the current secretary of UnionsWA, and assistant secretary under the member for Mirrabooka's leadership, who had principal carriage of the details of the workers compensation discussions between the Labor Party, the Labor government and the union movement more broadly. But let us not underestimate the member for Mirrabooka's contribution to that.

I am going to address the questions raised by the opposition and then I will talk about other issues raised by government members. The first is the question about cost impacts. The government did not do the analysis of how much impact this legislation would have on premiums. We engaged WorkCover WA and PwC actuaries who are independent of government to do the assessment of the cost impacts for this legislation. They made preliminary cost estimates for the bill as drafted in 2021. Those cost estimates were then shared with stakeholders as part of the consultation process on the bill. The stakeholders were able to make submissions to WorkCover on those cost estimates. Subsequently, PwC took into account the issues raised by stakeholders in providing final comprehensive costings on the bill, which are the figures highlighted in my second reading speech and in the supporting information. We are happy to provide that report to the opposition if it thinks it would be useful because it is a highly technical report. It is not a secret. It is the sort of thing that regularly goes to the WorkCover board, which makes many important decisions.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** I think you answered my query. You sent out at least the original scoping, or the preliminary study, to the stakeholders and they have had the chance to review it.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Yes. Every year, fresh actuarial advice is commissioned and provided to WorkCover. That is then shared with the board of WorkCover, which makes a decision based on the recommendation of the leadership of WorkCover, and a decision is then made on the premium rates. I acknowledge Chris Watt, the chief executive of WorkCover, at the back of the chamber. The premium rates do not, of course, bind any individual insurer. Those rates are adjusted on people's claims experience. The premium rates are in a band. We have talked about that for the agricultural industry. Within the band, some insurance companies will add loadings if people have a very bad claims performance. The bands are the guidelines for the costs.

It is interesting that the changes in this legislation are not particularly expensive, and I will explain why. The catastrophic injury arrangements are a requirement as part of the creation of the NDIS. We have to do that. All the other states have done it. We have done it for third-party motor vehicle insurance and we are now doing it for this area. Because we have a capped scheme, we push the costs on to the commonwealth when they get beyond the

limits of the scheme. That whole idea of NDIS is that everybody gets enough support. No matter the cause of the injury, the support is there. We have to make sure that the scheme covers those costs because we cannot push it on to the NDIS. That is the purpose of that. Everybody is insured. I am sure the member understands that, mathematically, the broader the base, the smaller the impact individual cases will have on the large base. It will not be particularly expensive. It is the same as the doubling of the medical expenses. We already have a provision in the act that allows people to get access to a higher amount for medical expenses and almost everyone who needs the additional expenses can access them, but they have to go through the process of showing that they do not have enough of their own resources. That is not really a modern way to do it, but not many people need the additional money, and therefore there is no expectation that more people will claim for the maximum amount; it is about how people get access to it. Because most workers compensation claims are at the smaller end of the scale, it will not have a large impact on the cost of the scheme. It is the same with the increase in the step down from 13 to 26 weeks. For workers covered by awards, the step down will not have the same impact as it might for other workers. Nonetheless, most workers return work within 13 weeks, and therefore extending it to 26 weeks will not be as expensive as people might have originally thought. The scheme is designed to get people back to work as quickly as possible. As a former workers compensation officer for the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, the former National Union of Workers, the Food Preservers' Union of Australia, and the Clothing and Allied Trades Union of Australia that worked out of our office, I can tell members that it is better for everybody to get people back and reconnected to their workplace as quickly as possible. This legislation aims to do that. However, it is very important to provide adequate support to those who have more serious injuries, and that is why we are pushing out the step-down provision from 13 weeks to 26 weeks.

We are not changing the rehabilitation expenses. Rehabilitation is already paid for as part of the compensation scheme. We are not changing the status of the rehab expenses. Therefore, there should not be any impact on the premium. We are just changing the administrative arrangements around the rehab.

I was here when the member for Cottesloe talked about the issue of preventing employer attendance at medical examinations. I want to make this point immediately. When I came to the job, one of the first things I discussed with the leadership of WorkCover was that I wanted it to put out a clarification on the status of medical appointments. There are two different types of medical appointments that an employee can be asked to attend. The first is when they are getting treatment for their injury and the second is if they are being reviewed on behalf of the employer's insurer. They are fundamentally different issues. There has never been a right for an employer to attend a treatment. I worked with the WorkCover leadership, including members of the board. WorkCover pointed out through notices that there was no right for an employer to attend a worker's treatment because it is none of the employer's business what the treatment is; that is between the injured party and their medical professional and is a decision based on the medical issues, not on the workers compensation claim.

A separate issue is a review of a worker's injury by a doctor engaged by the employer's insurer. That is a separate issue because communication might be needed with the medical practitioner. Again, all we are doing here is codifying the fact that employers have no right to attend the treatment session and codifying that although a patient is given a personal examination by a medical practitioner for the report, we do not want that done in the presence of an employer. If a person had a back injury and had to partially undress to receive the review by the medical practitioner engaged by the insurer, it would be completely unreasonable for someone representing the insurer or the employer to be present while the physical examination took place. All we are doing is codifying common sense. That is why I do not think it is attracting much pushback. There has never been a right for an employer to be present for the treatment and they are not to be present when an employee is being physically or clinically examined by a doctor on behalf of the insurer. Of course, the employer, or the insurer on behalf of the employer, has the right to ask for a report from the treating doctor to show that the employee's medical certificate says X, Y and Z and to ask about the view of A, B and C. The insurer may need to get a medical report by a doctor. Again, as a former union official dealing with workers comp, we all know that certain doctors are favoured by the insurers and that the reports that we see from those particular doctors are often similar, even though different patients have been examined. It is always amusing to read three or four reports on different workers and yet the wording is exactly the same for each one. That amuses us on this side of the bar.

The next issue is independent registered agents. This was a recommendation of the review under the former government, but the former minister for industrial relations did not support it. He was lobbied by the small number of independent registered agents and said that had he ever actually done this bill, he would not have included this bit, whereas when I came to government, I supported the recommendation from WorkCover. In 2018, maybe, I met with the registered agents and talked about this, but I was not moved on this issue. We are going to look at this issue. Perhaps we will not have a ban, but we will look at what happens in the industrial system. The problem is that we need a regulation regime, yet I think there are only five individual registered agents, so there is a lot of administrative expense for a very small number of people.

The other thing is that there is a difficulty. A union official is acting on behalf of an institution; they are not acting on their own behalf. Let us assume a union official gave advice that was incorrect. It is not the union official as an individual who is liable; it is the union that is then liable to be held to the wrong advice. That, obviously, is a different issue from an individual.

Another problem for lay advocates is that they walk a fine line between giving general advice about issues of experience and legal advice, and it is hard to see where those two things cross over. Again, that is not something that the union suffers because it is the union as an institution that is providing the advice; it is not providing legal advice. As I understand it, most of the independent registered agents are not actually former union officials; some of them are former plaintiff lawyers. Indeed, we brought in a provision in the part relating to industrial relations that struck-off lawyers cannot act as lay advocates, because that is what was happening: people would be struck off from practising law and then act as lay advocates, effectively doing the same work. Effectively, there has been nine years' notice because the report was in 2014, and there has been five years of me saying that I was not going to extend the regime. It is not a major part of the costs of WorkCover, but it is an unnecessary administrative burden that we can do without, so we are fixing that.

The member for Cottesloe asked about the safeguard arrangements for settlements. Settlements are very important. Western Australia's workers compensation system encourages settlements. It is an important aspect of the system. I must say that when I came into government, I was surprised that there were very few settlements under RiskCover in the public sector. One of the things I have done as Minister for Corrective Services is to encourage a lot of these long-duration claims to be settled. The whole idea of our scheme is to get closure. Of course, it is important to understand that just because there is a settlement, it does not mean that a fresh injury will not lead to a new claim, but that is an aggravation claim; it is not a continuation of the existing claim. Even if someone does not have a settlement and sustains a fresh injury, it will actually be a new claim, not the existing claim, so getting a settlement is often a better way forward.

We should also remember that just because a person is injured at work, it does not mean that they have an automatic right to go back to their original job because their contract of employment is for the original job; if they are not able to perform that job, they will have to either find another job or leave their employer. It is not straightforward, and this is actually one of the things for which we have been criticised for not fixing. Some people say that there should be compensation for people who are not able to return to their job. Workers compensation in WA does not do that; it is the common-law system, but we restrict access to common law because people have to have a 15 per cent total bodily impairment and most workplace injuries do not lead to a 15 per cent total bodily impairment. We have been criticised by some advocates, including plaintiff lawyers, for not fixing that through this legislation, but we have not changed those arrangements.

We are trying to make sure that there is always a pathway to settlement and that some safeguards are built in so that the director has to perform statutory functions to make sure that the settlement is genuine, that the issues involved in the settlement have been properly reflected in the agreement and that the worker is aware that when they reach the settlement, that is the end of the claim. They need to understand what is occurring. Often when I meet people in the community on matters relating to challenges in the workers compensation system, I find that they made a decision when they did not understand the decision they were making. They criticise the system when it is actually the decision they made, and they made the wrong decision because they were unrepresented.

This is one of the challenges in our workplaces because of lower unionisation rates. If someone is a union member, they can go to the union and get advice. The union can help them navigate that process. Someone might be injured at the workplace and not exceed the 15 per cent total bodily impairment, so it might not be directly noticeable that they have been injured, but they are injured nonetheless. It could be a psychological injury. If they are unrepresented, they can often accept an agreement that is not the best outcome for them. I encourage people to join their union because it is the insurance against the insurance. If someone has a union to represent them, the union can help steer them through a complex system. Even after this legislative change to simplify the act, it is still going to be complicated legislation because it is a complicated issue, so I would encourage most people to be represented, even if it is by a plaintiff lawyer. However, I think the easiest pathway is for them to join a union. They get other benefits, but the number one benefit is that they will always be represented in this process to make sure that they understand what the consequences are of any decision they make along the way.

It is often amusing. I remember once representing a low-skilled worker and the employer was going on about the surveillance footage they had of this worker. They said, "You wouldn't want this matter to go to arbitration because we would have to produce our surveillance footage." I asked for the footage and I watched it at the union office. Something did not look right, so I got a stopwatch—this was back in the days before digital everything—and timed it, and the time stamp was wrong. The employer had edited the tape. I cannot remember the exact figure, but the timer said something like seven minutes, but it was actually five and a half minutes, so we asked what happened in the missing one and a half minutes. In another case there were four sections of tape and each of them were 30 seconds long. That is ridiculous, because you cannot see the actual story. So workers can be presented with situations like this, with employers saying, "This could be really bad for you", but if they have an advocate, they can clear these things up pretty quickly and make sure that they are looked after in the whole process.

The member also asked a question about presumptive firefighter cancers. I make the point that this legislation deals with the issues in the current legislation. They are not designed to create new entitlements, other than the specific entitlements that we took to the election. I know the United Professional Firefighters Union of WA is currently asking questions about presumptive cancers, so WorkCover engaged external professional advice. It went to an academic

who works in the area of epidemiology, who has prepared a review. That review will be made available to the Nationals WA because it asked for it. If the Liberal Party wants it, it can have it also. I am not tabling it, but we will make it available. We have nothing to hide; that is the professional advice that is before WorkCover and it will add some additional cancers to the presumptive cancer list, including melanoma and mesothelioma. This legislation will allow that to be done by regulation, so we do not have to do it through an additional act of Parliament. We will continue to talk to the UPFU about other issues, but I make it clear that the technical professional advice that we have a moment is that there is no scientific evidence to support other cancers being added to the list.

As I said, we will continue to engage with the union. I met with the national leadership of the union, the state leadership of the union and the gentleman from Canada, Alex Forrest, on Monday evening in a pub in Victoria Park. That sounds like a real union place to meet! We talked through all the issues from everybody's perspective and will continue to talk to the union about what happens next.

Pre-employment screening is the next issue that was raised.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

## COST OF LIVING

### *Motion*

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house decries the McGowan Labor government for its failure to deliver key services and meet budget commitments, compounding cost-of-living pressures on Western Australian households.

We know that the combination of inflation, an overheated housing market, the rising cost of food, the supply chain issues besetting our industries and our retail sectors and the limited amount of government assistance that has been made available has meant that many households have struggled over recent months just to cover their basic necessities—the cost of living. We have seen the erosion of the purchasing power of their wages. Many on fixed incomes are finding it particularly difficult, but even families with a wage coming in are finding it very hard to make ends meet. The cost-of-living crisis is engulfing much of Western Australia.

We know that this state has been supported by the high demand for many of our products, particularly iron ore, and there has also been strong demand for agricultural produce. We have had some very good seasons throughout much of the grain-growing area and in other areas we have had strong demand for agricultural products, but that has often been in the midst of labour shortages that have sometimes affected the amount of food available. Getting the food to market has not always been as smooth as it has been in the past. Of course, that all feeds into the price of the product. In some areas, it has become quite difficult for people to access fresh produce. I note the particular issues of those people who are struggling in the Kimberley at the moment. Meanwhile, and distressingly, many Western Australian families are struggling with high interest rates and high living expenses. These families need to be considered in the upcoming budget. Today it was disappointing to see that the Premier ruled out freezing fees and charges, so we will see a repeat of the increases in the recent past under this government. At a time when it has a massive budget surplus, it is increasing costs for households and Western Australian families. That is flowing through to families to such a degree that they are now facing a very steep rise in the cost of living.

*The West Australian* reported it recently examined a broad range of grocery items —

... commonly purchased by consumers and found the total cost had jumped from \$90.26 in 2019 to \$141.68 in 2022—a 57 per cent increase.

I doubt that many households have had their income increase by 57 per cent. Obviously, householders in Western Australia are having trouble making ends meet. The *Foodbank hunger report 2022* showed that over the previous 12 months, 280 000 households in Western Australia had gone hungry as a result of insufficient income. That is not 280 000 people; that is 280 000 households. A very significant portion of the Western Australian economy is doing it tough. That means that people may be skipping meals and kids might be going to school without breakfast. The breakfast program is run in many schools. Foodbank contributes to that program in many areas. In the communities I represent, I know just how essential it is for that program to continue. A child who has not had adequate nutrition in the morning will find it very hard to study, learn and interact properly at school. In some communities, especially communities in my electorate that have larger Aboriginal populations, it is very important that local people are involved to make sure that solutions are in place.

I was recently at a school function in Three Springs. The ladies who organise the breakfast club were acknowledged. They are running it out of the goodness of their hearts and not getting any return. They make sure that the kids who go to school have something in their bellies so that they can learn while they are at school. Foodbank reports that for the time it has been in operation, most of the people who came to it did not normally have a wage, but at the moment, more than 50 per cent of the people who actively use Foodbank have a job or someone in their household has a job. If someone wants to use Foodbank, they have to be referred there and go through a process to ensure that they are in financial distress. That just goes to show that things are changing for many people on lower incomes in Western Australia. They are certainly feeling the stress in these hard times.

A group in my electorate that is doing a tremendous job and stands out to me is called Toodyay Locals Care, which is run by a lady named Roz Davidson. Years ago, out of the goodness of her heart, she set up a program to assist many people in the community. I am pleased that oftentimes at Christmas, the group puts on a Christmas lunch for the community. I am pleased to be able to support that and occasionally go along on Christmas Day to help with the lunch. Every week, Toodyay Locals Care regularly hands out 100 meals to people in that small community who need them. There is no Meals on Wheels or any formal services that people can turn to at the moment. Roz Davidson reports that she is aware of 20 individuals or families who live in substandard homes but are paying skyrocketing rents and going without power because they cannot afford to pay for it. These people are in dire straits.

It is appalling that in the wealthiest state in the wealthiest country we are seeing people going hungry in a beautiful place like Toodyay. Nobody in Western Australia should be going hungry. Nobody should be experiencing that level of distress. That needs to be acknowledged and some help needs to be given to assist organisations that are a backstop for those people. The opposition asked that \$300 million be allocated to further fund these services that are under such demand at the moment. I am not sure whether that request will be considered in the budget. The Premier has been quite consistent in responding that he did not believe that allocations like that reflected good economic management. That would seem to prohibit that sort of fund being set up. He says it is possible that there might be a global recession and that the windfall surpluses that his government has been gifted by the mining boom need to be put aside. He talks about the possible recession ahead. I wonder whether he considers how negative sentiments like that could impact business confidence going forward. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia advises that Western Australia is well placed to weather any financial storms associated with a possible global recession. However, it notes that confidence levels for the next 12 months are now at their lowest since before the beginning of the pandemic. *Business News* reports that the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported a drop in private capital expenditure of 7.6 per cent over the quarter to September 2022. New investment in machinery and equipment dropped by 10.7 per cent over the quarter, with capital spending on buildings and structures falling to a lesser extent by 5.3 per cent.

The budget surplus in Western Australia is largely powered by mining. The other sectors are important for the domestic economy, but much of the money rolls in from the mining industry. The iron ore price that Treasury used to forecast was set at \$US66 a tonne. It has been set very conservatively, and that seems to indicate that we will have further surpluses going forward. In fact, Morgan Stanley, an investment bank, predicts a second quarter 2023 average price of \$US140 a tonne, well above the \$US66 a tonne that is mentioned in the budget. I am sure that we will continue, at least in the medium term, to see some level of surplus coming into this state. The excuses the Premier puts forward are beginning to wear very thin.

The state's mining sector has delivered growth in capital expenditure since 2019, but non-mining has failed to keep pace. Investment decisions need to be based on business confidence. Talking down the state and talking down the economy going forward has a depressing effect on business investment. If we take away the massive projects, the investment does not look as good.

I want to raise a specific issue of failure—that is, failure to provide a reliable power supply to many households in many areas of the state. That matter has been topical since the Christmas blackouts and the Shepherd report that was subsequently produced. Around the time that happened, there were continuing rolling power outages throughout the midwest, the region I represent, and other areas of the state such as Kalgoorlie had incidents. A petition went to the other place calling for a review of the power supply in regional areas, outside of the Shepherd inquiry into the Christmas blackouts that affected mainly the metropolitan area or nearby, and some regional areas also. That petition was the first e-petition to be presented to the Legislative Council since its inception of the electronic petition methodology. However, the request for an independent review fell on deaf ears. In the midwest power outages two weeks ago, 24 000 to 27 000 households were affected, depending on which hour of the two days of power outage is considered—six hours on the Wednesday and seven hours on the Friday. The minister was forced to apologise for the failure to provide power into the midwest. That is the first time I have heard that minister apologise for anything and I think it is reflective of an understanding that he is gaining that maybe he made a mistake when he ruled out not having an inquiry into the regional power situation specifically. It is obvious that areas of the midwest are suffering greatly from the lack of power and the lack of a reliable power infrastructure. It is not just the weather; the infrastructure is not up to standard. This is affecting business badly. I know it is not just in regional areas. I note that a power outage recently affected the Mullaloo IGA and it lost \$100 000 worth of stock. Equivalent shops in my electorate have had to spend tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars to properly equip themselves with power supplies that are independent of the grid or continue to lose stock at the sort of level the Mullaloo IGA lost on that occasion.

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** Did they get their \$85?

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** It would not have got that because the outage probably did not last for the required number of hours on that occasion and I do not think it would get a response for \$85 for \$100 000 worth of stock. However, I note that as a result of some of our pressure, the government lifted that \$85 power fund. Interestingly, on the Friday, when the power supply in the midwest was so badly affected, the CEO of Western Power and a bunch of people

were in Dongara at a drop-in meeting with local residents. As a result of the parlous state of the power supply in Dongara, the CEO responded to a written request from me to communicate with the public. It was enormously instructive to him to arrive in Dongara when there was no power—yet again. Of course, that was a perfect opportunity for people of the area to put to him their displeasure with the supply of power. I have had constituents come into my office and sit in front of me and tell me that they are putting their houses on the market because of the power supply situation. Obviously, that is a huge issue in the midwest and in other regional areas as well. I know it is not just the midwest that is affected, but Kalgoorlie and other places.

The CEO of the Mid West Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Joanne Fabling, has been outstanding in her advocacy for improved power supplies into the midwest. When we are thinking about what money could be spent to enable further economic development, a proper power supply to what is surely going to be one of the future economic powerhouses of the state makes perfect sense. Instead, the midwest has been left with a system of wooden poles and wires as the main transmission line from Three Springs into Geraldton. That system is over 50 years old. It was extensively damaged in cyclone Seroja, yet no plan is in place to put in a proper transmission network into the midwest—something that would greatly reinforce economic growth for the whole state going forward. They are the types of investments that need to be made into the future, not investments that are entirely based on vanity projects that will not provide that level of economic impact and that level of opportunity for economic growth going forward. That area's power supply system was badly affected by cyclone Seroja. People are leaving the area. Those towns are hollowing out. That is a worrying situation indeed and needs to be addressed into the future.

If we want to make use of the boom we are in and enable Western Australia to escape from the boom-and-bust cycle that we have had for a hundred years, we need to invest in other industries and in other types of infrastructure other than just iron ore and the traditional industries. This government has made much of programs that it has supposedly put in place to promote diversification of the industrial base and economic base, but I am not sure that we are seeing much of a result from that at this time.

Diversification of our economic base is something that I strongly support, as it is certainly a very good idea to not have all your eggs in one basket. Having all your eggs in the iron ore basket to produce income for the state will be eminently risky way down the track. One day there will be a correction, but the indication is that that is not coming soon. We should use that boom to ensure a secondary boom is coming along in new industries and that we have a mature economy, rather than an economy based on one or two primary industries—great though they are. We need to ensure we do other things as well. While we have surpluses, this is an opportunity to not only support households in a more targeted and effective way, but also improve opportunities for economic development and business growth.

One thing holding that back to an extent is a lack of meaningful engagement with businesses around things like payroll tax reductions. The government has had an opportunity with the rivers of money flowing in to actually kickstart business in other directions, especially by ensuring that small and medium businesses hit by payroll tax are given some form of relief. There will no doubt be more to say about that over the coming years as we move towards the election cycle. At the moment, suffice to say, studies have shown that payroll tax has some really negative impacts on our society in discouraging employment. In fact, the Economic Regulation Authority has raised concerns and said that a business may be inclined to send its operations offshore or to another jurisdiction, or may decide not to expand because it does not want to be hit by that initial interaction with payroll tax. That business may instead choose to use contractors or outsource work or perhaps just limit growth that it would have otherwise undertaken.

We also know that this state has one of the most distressing situations that has developed in recent times; that is, the situation of people without homes. Right throughout the metropolitan area and in some country areas people are homeless and have nowhere to shelter. This government has made much of its commitments to social housing and the homeless. It developed a portfolio for homelessness. I think homelessness is something that we used to see little of in Western Australia, but it is now becoming distressingly apparent that people are falling through the cracks, and the charities and services that support them are also coming under pressure. As I said, we have put forward ideas to try to relieve some of that pressure. I am sure other members will talk on this matter as well. When the opposition points to failures of the government on this issue, government members make up a fairytale based on programs announced and budget figures that bear no relation to what is being delivered on the ground. The delivery is not there and we know the government has gone backwards in the number of houses available. The government has not been able to get on top of that.

I want to talk about another issue in the minutes I have left—namely, supply chain constraints I mentioned earlier impacting business in Western Australia. At the moment, we know the government is very committed to Westport and to shifting industry out of Fremantle and into Kwinana as the major port for Western Australia going forward. I went to Kwinana, along with the then Leader of the Opposition, for the first time in a number of years to have a look, and I saw some of the industry there. I have been back several times since. I was quite taken aback by just how constrained that area seems already in terms of available land and infrastructure coming into it. The rail system is barely adequate and seems to be almost reaching close to capacity. We know a whole range of industries there are not directly related to the port, and it has been left to grow in a different sort of way I would say. Making it the pre-eminent port is already going to be difficult with land constraints around it. More consideration needs to be

given to some regional ports. That would certainly make a lot of sense. I note that the Pilbara Ports Authority is doing quite a bit of work on this. It has been able to bring in more general cargo, containers and the like, straight into the Pilbara, which is an eminently sensible idea; I personally support more of that happening in the future. It has a couple of benefits. First, more efficiency can be achieved relative to the cost of getting materials through alternative ports as the system would not be tied to one or two operators. It would also create transport efficiency in terms of the miles travelled going mainly into Asia and Europe. There is also the other advantage of not having to freight stuff back up the Great Northern Highway into the Pilbara from Perth and Fremantle. Clearly, a lot of benefits and efficiencies could be gained. As we talk about trying to minimise greenhouse gases, cutting the miles product has to travel makes a lot of sense, not just in dollar terms with the freight cost but also in the carbon output of the freight task. To me, more road freight needs to be supplanted by more efficient ways of travel.

Interestingly, Bunbury port is connected to Perth by rail but has no ability to take containers. For producers in the south west, which is something of a food bowl, there is a lot of potential for a container system to be developed in Bunbury as well that could serve many smaller producers and industries in the south west. I know that other opportunities are coming in certain types of new industries into the future. Again, looking more holistically beyond just Kwinana could provide a good outcome.

Interestingly, I asked the minister a little while ago what happened to the \$2 million fund allocated to the feasibility study into the future of a live export facility after the closure of Fremantle as a live export facility. Apparently, that study has been given to a little committee of four that the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has announced. That committee will look at the destruction of the sheep livestock export industry—with that, in many areas, the destruction of the sheep industry as that will have a lot of run-on effects for people. I applaud the work that has been done by the likes of David Littleproud, and also our own members here in Western Australia such as the member for Roe whose community will be greatly affected by this. I applaud other National and Liberal members who have been much more vocal in their support of the industry than the Premier or the Minister for Agriculture and Food in Western Australia. I applaud and thank them for their work. They are doing what they can to make up for all the Labor members of Parliament who cannot talk to each other or get the message across.

**Ms S.F. McGurk** interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Does the member support livestock export?

**Ms S.F. McGurk** interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Do you support livestock export?

**Ms S.F. McGurk** interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Do you support livestock export? No.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife):** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I talked earlier about business confidence, and put a regional focus on that. A study conducted by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia surveyed business confidence in some regional areas. In December last year, that survey showed that two-thirds of those surveyed in the wheatbelt, more than half the businesses in the south west and half in the midwest and Gascoyne were concerned about the supply chain issues I spoke about earlier and identified that as a barrier going forward.

As I also mentioned, communities are suffering in the aftermath of cyclone Seroja and they face constraints. We are also aware of the situation in the Kimberley following the 100-year flood event that knocked out transport links. We have limited transport links in and out of and through Western Australia. We need to make sure that we develop the Goldfields Highway, the Outback Way, Tanami Road and other routes so that we have more transport options in Western Australia. The recent flooding of the Fitzroy River has shown that the Kimberley is particularly vulnerable. We actually have only one road north and that puts us at some peril. I think we need other transport opportunities through those regions so that we do not see a repeat of the distressing situation emerging in the Kimberley at the moment. It is hugely expensive to turn a 3 000-kilometre freight task through Port Hedland into a 6 000-kilometre freight task through Port Augusta. I think that, along with the flooding of the Trans-Australia Railway and cuts to highway traffic et cetera, shows that we need a more robust transport network in Western Australia.

I know a committee was established. It seemed to be a Maritime Union of Australia-dominated affair, but it acknowledged that this is a problem that needs to be addressed. To get beyond a situation in which the next cyclone or the next fire leaves a region imperilled, we need to make serious efforts to improve those transport links.

I note the Minister for Transport's announcement today on the development of the new Fitzroy River bridge. I refer to an article in *The West Australian*. There was also a media release from the minister on the matter, but I had a look at *The West Australian* report because those reports are always better written and more enjoyable to read. The article refers to the project and the ambitious time line. I welcome that Georgiou Group has been contracted for this task. I have much more confidence in it as the contractor for the construction than I do in the minister running her program. I welcome the announcement and wish Georgiou Group all the best. For the sake of the Kimberley, we need that road done as quickly as possible. I have more confidence in Georgiou Group than I have in the minister.



I remember when the minister announced that a barge solution would be found. I have a picture of the barge. It is not a terribly big picture—but it is not a terribly big barge! Is that barge the solution? I thought it would have taken three days to find that barge and take it on a truck up to where it had to go. Instead, it took weeks. We were promised something that would move road trains, but one would have to disassemble a road train and break it down into small pieces to get it across the river on that barge, and then carry its cargo across one by one.

**Dr D.J. Honey** interjected.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** They might put two cows on at once, but it would not be much of a trip. I think it would probably tip over on the way if they moved to one side.

I think that barge with a couple of outboard motors on the back is a damning indictment of a solution that was purported to be a heavy transport link. It was very disappointing, but we are used to being disappointed by that minister.

I was again disappointed to learn that the minister does not seem to care much for the environmental disaster that she is responsible for at Jurien Bay. When her government came into power, it stripped away \$8.5 million of funding that had been allocated for the marina, but it has taken no responsibility for the ongoing environmental disaster that it has become.

We hear this government make large policy announcements across many areas, but it fails to deliver on those announcements. The Premier insists that he has big surpluses, but he is also putting money into special purpose accounts so that he does not have to report it in the surplus. He is squirrelling away an immense amount of money and claims it is for a rainy day.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** About March 2024.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Funny that—but I will say it must have been raining a little bit when we debated the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill. The Treasurer had to come to Parliament and ask for an extra \$3.1 billion to keep the lights on in Western Australia. That was quite a rainy day. It must have been a bit of a storm in a teacup on that day the Treasurer asked for \$3.1 billion!

The government's last budget delivered very little in tangible relief for Western Australian households. Sadly, given the Premier's response today and lack of concern for the plight of Western Australian families and people doing it tough, I do not think the next budget will be any better.

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [4.37 pm]: I rise to contribute to this debate and support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I will cover a range of areas of key government service delivery. As the shadow Minister for Health, I have spoken a lot in this place about the obvious failures we have seen under the McGowan government. The government has effectively overseen the running down of the hospital system since it came to office. Last year, there were 66 000 hours of ambulance ramping, which is the highest level of ramping on record. We have seen the elective surgery waitlist blow out as well. There has also been a number of tragic events under this government's watch. After all, investment in the health system to address and arrest ambulance ramping and elective surgery waitlists is about the health and welfare of Western Australians.

This afternoon I want to focus on an area of health that I do not get the opportunity to speak on much at all—that is, the early childhood years. Following the 2021 election, we made a specific portfolio for the early childhood years. Our shadow for that portfolio, Hon Donna Faragher, is in the other place. She has done an extraordinary amount of work in this area, which has pointed to a real waitlist crisis that we are seeing under this government.

It is reflective of what we know about this government's priorities when it comes to health. Recently, I was speaking to a leader in health who believed that this government does not get health. That is the comment they made. They also said that the Premier is not interested in investing in and ensuring that there are good outcomes. I am sure that members of the opposition and members of the government have heard about the significant issues of waitlist blowouts, for children in particular, that we have seen under this government.

Our shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education has raised these issues. She has called for an inquiry into this area, and it is good that it has received support. The petition for an inquiry into Child Development Services received significant support, with over 3 700 signatures. It is good that the government supported this inquiry, which was driven by the opposition. However, although it is critical that this inquiry is underway, it is important that work continues on, and is not held up by, the significant issues that we are seeing across the board.

This call for urgent action to reduce waitlists deserves to be heard. New figures reveal that families are now waiting for almost 18 months to see key health specialists. The wait time for primary school-age children to see a clinical psychologist is now 17 months. That is an increase from 12 months in February last year. In key health services, the current median wait time to access a paediatrician is 17.8 months. The current median wait time to access a speech pathologist is 12.2 months. These are significant issues. As the local member representing the Vasse electorate, an area of regional WA, I often hear how exacerbated these issues are in regional areas.

The south west community has been rocked by the recent suicide of Jye Dyer. His mother, Michelle Offer, recently spoke on ABC radio. Jye had autism. He was very much a well-loved person of that community. Michelle explained how he had started to struggle with focus and had behaviour issues at school, which led to suspensions and withdrawals.

I quote —

“He was still a happy kid at home, he was still away fishing and crabbing, right up to the last couple of days,” ...

She said that she struggled to get an appointment for Jye with a psychiatrist or a paediatrician after her doctor suggested that he had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. A private psychiatrist was able to offer her an appointment but not until November 2023, and she was advised that there was an 18-month wait to see a paediatrician. This story is not unique. It is absolutely tragic. I directed to the minister’s office another case of somebody in a similar situation trying to get appointments for their child. After attempting to seek out a paediatrician last year, they were not able to attain an appointment until mid–this year, which is distressing. It is fair to say that Michelle is certainly very brave in her comments on ABC radio. She said that if her son had been able to get ADHD medication, he would still be here. Obviously, we do not know whether that is the case. Michelle Offer states —

“I’m sure that it would have calmed down so he could just focus and relax,” ...

Child specialist wait times are too long —

...

“I honestly don’t think there’s anything I can do to help anybody, because we can’t speed up the waitlist,” she said.

We have seen a blowout in the waitlist for speech pathologists as well, and those wait times are particularly significant. They have increased from 8.7 months to 12 months. There are now over 6 100 people on the waitlist to see a paediatrician.

Early intervention is vitally important. As a member representing regional WA, I understand the significant challenge in accessing services. It is happening in not only the regions, but also Perth. We need to see a significant uplift in funding, which is currently not there and has not been there over the last few years.

Our shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education also highlighted the need for the government to think outside the box in the delivery of child development services. Hon Donna Faragher has talked about the need for the government to work better alongside allied health services. Obviously, this has a significant impact on learning outcomes if it is not properly addressed. Members can imagine, and I think it is clear and obvious, that if a child cannot see a speech pathologist or paediatrician in a timely manner, if that waitlist is a year, it will have a significant impact on that child’s learning outcomes or worse, as we understand.

Another issue our shadow minister raised is when it comes to early intervention, there are gaps with child health nurses. We are seeing significant issues across the state. According to questions asked in the Legislative Council late last year, there were about 40 full-time equivalent vacant positions for community child development health nurses across the Child and Adolescent Health Service and the WA Country Health Service. They had about 20 vacant positions each. At the time, we also saw that 233 children were on a stand-by list for a child health check. For the Swan region, there was a significant jump in the number of children on the waitlist, from 26 in June, several months before, to 92 children. The central west region had 41 children waiting; in Bentley and the lower west regions, there were 25 children on the stand-by list for a child health check. We need to ensure that these timely health checks happen. The government should be doing everything it can to ensure that these checks not only happen in a timely manner, but also people are encouraged to take steps towards any early intervention measures that may be required to keep children healthy. Child health workers and nurses across the system are continuing to do more with less. They are under extraordinary pressure. They play a vital role in delivering this early intervention care. When services are unable to be provided or are stretched in this way, it puts our whole system under pressure. I hope that it does not lead to people turning away from vitally important steps towards an early intervention approach to better health outcomes.

A local family contacted me about their son and grandson; I spoke to both his mother and grandmother. They told me that in the middle of last year, he started to struggle at school, displaying behavioural issues that have led to many suspensions. He had been referred to a clinic in Busselton, but the earliest available appointment for him to see a paediatrician is not until July 2023. That is about a year from when he was referred. The family are very fearful for his mental health and wellbeing. They have listened to the heartbreaking interviews of the brave mother of Jye and what she has said about the significant wait times. These wait times are clearly not acceptable. They represent a real failure in the delivery of key services to our vulnerable children to ensure that they will be better prepared as they grow up.

Another concern has been raised with me about community nurses at special needs schools. A parent from Burbridge School in Koondoola contacted me specifically and she was happy for me to raise her concerns here. Burbridge School is a special needs school, and I understand that it has 63 students. Last year, it barely managed with three full-time community nurses onsite. In December 2022, the school was advised by the Department of Health that from term 1 of this year, the department would provide only 1.4 FTE onsite community nurses. I have been advised that the school is stepping in to fund nurses to fill the void that has been created by this cut in funding for the school, but that is clearly not sustainable for the school.

[Member’s time extended.]

**Ms L. METTAM:** The feedback I have had is that this temporary measure will mean that some students will have to remain at home and miss out on the education that they are as entitled to as any other student. Given their special needs, they need to be in a safe environment.

I also focus on a couple of issues that continue to be raised with me locally. One is the community local area coordination program. This was a valuable program that had provided local face-to-face contact for residents across the Margaret River region, including Busselton, Margaret River and the Capes region. It was essentially an early intervention community triage service that helped people to find and gain the right kind of support before they reached crisis point. It provided a range of different supports. I raised a grievance in this place last year about this program. The service was well patronised during the 12-month trial period. The local area coordinator had seen more than 150 short and long-term clients, including many women and vulnerable children, and the importance of this service cannot be underestimated. The Margaret River community has experienced significant trauma, particularly over the last five years with a number of suicides and a mass shooting, and there were very real concerns that this community triage service was not able to continue. The local area coordination program was always intended to be a two-year trial, but it is concerning that when the trial finished, there was no public report given on the success or otherwise of the trial. A real gap in services has been left in its wake, with a perceived reticence by the department to employ new staff as positions were vacated prior to the end of the trial both in Margaret River and Busselton. I have raised a grievance in this place about that. The Margaret River and Busselton communities have stepped up to provide some support to those who are vulnerable. There have been significant cries from the Margaret River and Busselton communities about the fact that this program has not been able to continue. It is a significant community concern that this program did not continue and that there was no transparency around the success or otherwise of how that trial actually went.

The other issue that I and the former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Central Wheatbelt, have raised in this house is the need to upgrade Margaret River Hospital. I understand that the local member, the new member for Warren–Blackwood, has declined to join the call for urgent funding to support this project, but we on this side of the house—the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA—certainly support what the WA Country Health Service has stated is an urgent need and a priority project. The community has been let down by the lack of support for this vital project. The stalled master plan included the expansion of the Margaret River emergency department. Shadow cabinet was at an event last year. An article states —

One of the region’s most prominent doctors has launched a passionate appeal to the State’s Health Minister on behalf of the beleaguered Margaret River Hospital ...

The doctor was quoted as saying —

“People come in and say ‘where is the emergency department’ and we say ‘you’re here,’” ...

The article continues —

The doctor asked about the status of a long-delayed master plan for expanding the campus which has seen a dramatic increase in presentations during the COVID pandemic buoyed by the region’s population growth and tourism appeal.

...

Dr Milligan said the hospital’s emergency department was now spilling out into the carpark and ambulance bays.

...

“When can we expect to see an infrastructure upgrade in Margaret River?” she asked.

I go to the government’s response in the article —

Ms Sanderson did not directly comment on the funding issue, reiterating lines about Labor’s “record” \$3.2 billion investment ...

Dr Milligan again raised concerns about that. That is very disappointing. The government continues to neglect the health needs of the people of Margaret River and more broadly across the region, including the seat of Vasse. There are real pressure points there as well. More broadly, there is a real crisis in children accessing the health support they need, whether that is speech pathology appointments, paediatricians, child health nurses or psychiatrists. There is clearly an urgent need to address this. Our children cannot wait because if timely support is not provided when they need it, these small issues become exacerbated.

**Ms M.J. Davies:** They are more expensive to deal with.

**Ms L. METTAM:** That is absolutely right, they become more expensive for the state to deal with and more challenging for the individual and their parents.

The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations had a hearing last week with the Child and Adolescent Health Service. I had asked some questions of the Minister for Health about the ministerial task force that had been provided with information about a very tragic suicide that took place over two years ago. Again, the

lack of funding for one of the key recommendations in the related report, as highlighted through the estimates committee process, is a real concern. It raises real questions about the extent to which this government is making health a priority and, importantly, whether this government is making the health of our children a priority. This side of the house continues to raise issues, as does the shadow spokesperson for early childhood in the other place, because there is whole-of-community concern. It is vitally important that the government acts urgently because our children cannot wait.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [5.04 pm]: I rise to support this motion, which states —

That this house decries the McGowan Labor government for its failure to deliver key services and meet budget commitments, compounding cost-of-living pressures on Western Australian households.

I refer to the disappointing response from the Premier today when asked what he would do in the budget. He is the Treasurer and the Premier and has his hand on the tiller, and what did he do? He spoke about what the Liberal–National government did 10, 12 and 15 years ago. That is what the community of Western Australia gets from the Premier. He wants to be the Treasurer and he wants to be the Premier, but he does not act on behalf of vulnerable people in Western Australia. The deflection from the Premier today when asked what he would do in the forthcoming budget was a real disappointment. I support the Leader of the Opposition's motion.

I point out the fantastic community of Esperance in my electorate of Roe, and some of the great voluntary services work being done in that community. Quite often, it is work that these community groups do on behalf of the Department of Communities because over the last couple of years, the Department of Communities has been hard to find when it comes to families in crisis in the Esperance region. On behalf of all of us here, I thank the likes of Chris Meyer and his team at Esperance Care Services. They do a fantastic job and won an award for active citizenship for the community for the organisation's support programs. The services at Esperance Care Services include emergency relief, counselling and referral services, and running a local thrift shop. I have been there several times. Some of the work done is amazing. In the past year, Esperance Care Services has provided help to more than 389 people, with 1 934 emergency relief programs. That is a very short summary of what the organisation does. It is an important part of that community. There is also Meredith Waters, who won the Esperance Community Citizen of the Year. She has many volunteering roles in the community. Veronica Lavars was awarded Senior Citizen of the Year. She has worked for over 40 years with vulnerable community members in Esperance. Dane Holdman won the award for the Young Community Citizen of the Year. He volunteers in many community organisations. I talk about those people because the Australia Day awards in Esperance give us a realisation of the good work done in the community. As I said, in many cases, unfortunately, the Department of Communities has been pretty thin on the ground in assisting some of our more vulnerable members of the community in Esperance.

I want to mention, as some of our members already have, the good work of Foodbank. I was out with Foodbank recently with the member for North West Central and the Leader of the Opposition, and it was amazing to see the great work it does in the Perth community and in many parts of the state. On that day we saw how much people rely on Foodbank. I see the need growing every day as we enter this period of higher interest rates. Inflation figures came down a little bit today, but I think we have a really difficult period ahead.

The other thing I will mention apart from the great work of Foodbank is the great work of the Clontarf Foundation and—not every school in the state do this—many of the schools in my electorate in providing the school breakfast program. The other week, I was at Nulsen Primary School in Esperance and I was shown what it does with its breakfast program. In Katanning, Narrogin and many other towns in my electorate, that is such a great service provided by our community members and schools. Unfortunately, this program seems to be slotting into everyday life at some of our schools. The government needs to be very much aware of what is happening out there at the coalface.

I want to talk today about some of the programs that the other states are providing. When the Premier is asked how he is going to help our vulnerable communities with the cost of living, he goes on about what the Liberal–National government did many years ago. Before the recent election, the New South Wales Liberal government had about 70 voucher programs for eligible people. Some of those programs include a \$285-a-year low-income household rebate; the Premier's Back to School NSW vouchers program, which provides \$350 vouchers for eligible students to buy school uniforms, shoes, bags, technology and textbooks; a gas rebate to a total of \$110 a year; and up to \$250 for the regional seniors travel card. As we know, under the former Liberal–National government's great royalties for regions program, we had the Country Age Pension Fuel Card. It is good to see that this government is continuing with it, although we would like to see more upward indexation. New South Wales also has a \$100 voucher for creative and cultural activities for kids and a \$100 voucher towards the cost of swimming lessons. The member for Central Wheatbelt and I are very much aware of how important swimming lessons are for people in our communities and of the many challenges we have at times with swimming lessons over the summer months. New South Wales also has \$100 for the Active Kids program; a life support energy rebate, which helps with the cost of running energy-intensive medical equipment at home; a medical energy rebate; access to concessional car parking; and the Rent Choice subsidy, which helps people pay rent for up to three years. They are some of the programs in New South Wales. I hope the new Labor government in New South Wales continues with those programs.

Queensland has up to \$1 500 to support foster carers; a \$175 electricity rebate, with \$372 a year for seniors and pensioners; a grant for two weeks to households in housing crisis to meet some of the costs of moving into private rental accommodation; a rebate for an oxygen concentrator or a kidney dialysis machine; an electricity concession for chronic medical conditions; and a \$150 voucher for children's sport.

South Australia has cost-of-living concessions to help people on low or fixed incomes and no interest loans of up to \$2 000 for essential goods and services such as household essentials, car repairs and registration, medical and dental services et cetera.

What do people in WA get when they google "cost-of-living assistance"? They get a page from the Department of Communities showing a phone number for people to ring to apply for a Seniors Card. There may be more vouchers and rebates, but try to find them. That is the challenge. It is very challenging for a vulnerable person to find how to get these rebates and make some progress. The Premier's statement that he is the leader on cost-of-living support is misleading and disingenuous. The evidence is clear for everyone to see, and we saw it in question time today.

The Premier's main focus is on the price of iron ore and the royalties that he can draw in to build up the treasure chest so that he can look at programs like Metronet, which we hear about all the time. We know it is the priority of this government.

**Ms R. Saffioti:** You don't like it?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** Unfortunately, we have a lot of vulnerable people in our community. I have no problem with Metronet. I have a problem with the way this Premier is treating the vulnerable people in our community. He has over 20 special purpose accounts. He is trying to build up the coffers and then gradually feed in the Water Corporation dividend and things like that when he needs it to boost his billions of dollars of surplus. We are awake to it. We are awake to the lack of assistance to our vulnerable community members.

I do not have long to talk today.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** In actual fact —

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am glad the Minister for Education has arrived.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am glad the Minister for Education has arrived.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Roe, are you taking interjections?

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I asked the Minister for Education —

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, please.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** On 21 February, I asked the Minister for Education what he was doing for parents who are using Afterpay to buy essential school supplies. His response was that if parents go to the school, they will receive assistance. How many parents know this? What are the criteria? How much is this assistance? Does it go as far as camps? What happens if parents cannot afford a new uniform or public transport? We are talking about a duty of care to our public education students.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The minister has just walked into the place and has not stopped talking since he got here.

Several members interjected.

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I am happy to continue.

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** The member is on his feet, minister, thank you.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr P.J. RUNDLE:** I want to go on with what the member for Vasse was talking about earlier, and that is the scenario in which we have a waiting list as long as your arm, with the likes of a two-year wait for an attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder diagnosis, which not only stalls the therapies available to the child, but also prevents funding to allow the teacher to have assistance through an aide in the classroom. It is a huge issue at the moment. This is coupled with 5 000 children waiting to see a speech pathologist and 6 000 waiting to see a paediatrician, adding to the rise in the cost-of-living worries of already stressed-out families. That is what the member for Vasse was talking about earlier.

The other thing I want to talk about is the KidSport voucher system. I believe this government has a real opportunity. It doubled the amount for one year, but it has halved it again. This is an opportunity for the government to get these vulnerable kids off the streets. Sport is such an important thing to a whole generation of kids to know the joy of playing in a sporting team for their school or their club. Regional families know the amount it costs to assist their children into higher levels of sport. The regional athlete support program neglects the very people who are crucial to developing talent. It is the parents who get the kids to training centres in Perth. We know they have to travel each week, and sometimes twice a week, to give their kids the opportunity to get into a state team or the like. We know that sport is also a big incentive for Aboriginal children to attend school. Without financial support, parents and carers will no longer be able to offer their children the chance to play sport. A sports coordinator contacted us and told us that she pays the difference between the KidSport subsidy and the cost of subs, uniforms, footwear, equipment and sometimes mouthguards for 20 children per season. If she did not do that, those children would not be in a position to play sport. I certainly urge this government to take the opportunity to look at the KidSport voucher program, especially because it ensures that vulnerable kids can turn up to training every Saturday morning or during the week, and it makes such a difference.

As I said, this government has lost touch. The CSRFF is another one. I know that the member for Central Wheatbelt, who was once the sports minister, knows the importance of the community sporting and recreation facilities fund. We have \$10 million spread around the whole state, whether it be regional or metro. It just is not enough money. Our local governments, our sporting groups and the department have the chance to join on a one-third, one-third, one-third basis. The government, with a \$6 billion surplus, could take the opportunity to make sure that we have many more infrastructure buildings for our sporting clubs. It creates a great community balance. From my perspective, that is an opportunity that the Minister for Sport and Recreation could certainly look at.

As I said earlier today, my real disappointment with the Premier is that he is ignoring the vulnerable members of the community. He has lost touch with the average person out on the street. He might be remembered by the big end of town in some ways, but he will certainly be remembered for his treatment of our homeless people and low-income people and families.

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport)** [5.21 pm]: I thought I would jump up and take the call because that was a terrible contribution from the opposition. I thought I would wake up everyone and talk about what this government is doing to support vulnerable people in the community and also address the issue of cost of living. I note the motion is —

That this house decries the McGowan Labor government for its failure to deliver key services and meet budget commitments, compounding cost-of-living pressures on Western Australian households.

Those contributions seemed to be all over the place and did not address the motion that was moved. My colleagues will touch on some of the issues with services in the community, but I want to start by saying that one of the best things we can do to ensure that families can get ahead in this state is to make sure there are jobs for the community. If we look at all the indications in the labour force data, Western Australians have reached record employment levels in this state. Employment reached record levels in Western Australia, growing by 0.4 per cent in February 2023, with rises in both part-time and full-time employment. Despite some volatility in the monthly data, there has been a trend towards full-time work, which aligns with strong demand for labour. The unemployment rate was 3.9 per cent and our participation rate was 69.3 per cent—again, the strongest in the nation. When we look at how to make sure that Western Australians can get ahead, it is to make sure that they can get a job.

I think it is important to note that the new Minister for Training is here in the chamber. The state government has put in effort to make training available to young Western Australians so that people who might have not have ever got a job or have missed out on opportunities are now being provided opportunities in this state. Remember the massive hikes in training costs under the previous coalition Government. As I recall, there were increases of up to 500 per cent in the cost of training for Western Australians. When we came into government, we put a massive focus on training Western Australians and creating job opportunities for Western Australians and, as a result, we have the highest participation levels, the lowest unemployment rate, and also the highest employment levels in the nation. Making sure we continually have a pipeline of job opportunities has been a focus. As a result, we have seen that translate into the market.

I note some of the issues that were raised in relation to some of the services and wait times. It is true that it is a very hot market out there and there are labour force issues across the entire economy. We will continue to work through that by not only training Western Australians, but also looking at how we can support further opportunities for people to move to WA to support those essential services. We saw the Minister for Police recently travel overseas and not only target police officers but also workers across industries to see how we can support more people

coming to the state to address the many labour force shortages. It is a very, very hot economy, but, importantly, Western Australians are in employment like never before and have made enormous inroads to training and training Western Australians to get jobs.

The next issue I want to raise is housing. We need more housing opportunities in this state. We are driving more housing outcomes, but, again, every time we have put forward more ideas to support more housing in Western Australia, the opposition has opposed more housing and the diversification of housing supply. We continue to have a renewed focus on supporting more diversity of housing supply, more homes in this state and more places for people to live.

I want to talk to the issue of cost of living. We know that there are many cost-of-living challenges out there for people, in particular because of the interest rate rises. I think everyone who has a mortgage and who has not been on fixed interest rates, or those that are moving from fixed interest rates to variable, understand that these interest rate increases have impacted Western Australians as they have impacted many people. We know it is challenging for those who are working and trying to balance the mortgage costs with other costs of living. This state government has done more than any other government in history to support Western Australians and their household budgets.

I note in all the descriptions that the opposition raised today, it refused to acknowledge the \$400 electricity credit given in the previous budget. I note that the \$400 household electricity credit meant that representative household expenditure, as represented in the *Economic and fiscal outlook* of the state budget papers, fell this year. Two years before that, we had a \$600 WA household electricity credit. They are real things that happened but the opposition just skipped over those without acknowledging that because of the strong budget management, we have been able to support households in the last two budgets out of three by providing, in total, \$1 000 of electricity credit. That has really helped all Western Australians. I want to make a point. This credit was given to all Western Australians. Not only those who have been targeted with other programs in the past but all households were given this credit. The feedback that we got from many households was that they very much appreciated the \$400 credit and they very much appreciated the \$600 credit that we gave before that. Again, there was no acknowledgement in question time or in any of the discussions today of the electricity credit.

We are the only state that gave households a credit. It amounted to \$1 000 over the past three budgets. When we consider the total basket of the household budget, this graph from the *Economic and fiscal outlook* shows that under the previous coalition government, there were only increases—increases, increases, increases. When the coalition won government, we saw significant increases in electricity prices. In the past three budgets, our government has delivered a \$1 000 electricity credit to all Western Australians. Many initiatives have been undertaken by this government to support those who are struggling. None can be clearer than the initiative announced on Monday, with the support of this state government, to give job security to workers in the Activ industries employment space. The Premier met workers in the former Activ industries. Because of the state government's efforts and initiative, we are making sure that those working in the disability space have job security. That is just one example of how this government has provided extra support to those more vulnerable members of the community.

The opposition spokesperson has disappeared, but I will go through a couple of initiatives the government has undertaken in my area to support the cost of living and also vulnerable people in society. The first involves the driving access and equity program. The government has committed millions of dollars and is out there on the ground supporting people who have never had a chance to get their driver's licence, particularly those in regional and remote areas, and giving them the chance to get a licence. It is a dedicated program targeting people in the Kimberley, Pilbara, goldfields, Gascoyne and midwest who would not normally have access to specific programs to get their driver's licence. We have already seen enormous success. There are many stories of people who basically had no chance of getting a job, even though there were jobs in their local community. They are now getting jobs as a result of our access and equity program. We will provide more details of the success of the program that is resulting in more jobs and more opportunities for people who normally would not have been given that opportunity because they did not have a driver's licence.

I will mention a couple of initiatives in my portfolio, such as the regional airfare zone cap scheme. I understand parliamentary debate and the concept of motions and so forth, but the opposition has to give us credit for some of our initiatives that are making a real difference. It completely ignores things such as electricity credit and does not recognise the regional airfare zone cap, which is delivering hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars in savings to regional Western Australians. I am not just saying this because it is one of my initiatives, but it is one of the best initiatives I have ever seen supporting regional transport travel!

**Mrs L.A. Munday** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** What was that?

**Mr P.J. Rundle:** It was the member for Dawesville—you're being heckled, minister!

**Mrs L.A. Munday:** It is great—I was supporting you!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** She was supporting me! There is another initiative the member for Dawesville will be very excited about when I reflect on it in a minute.

The regional airfare zone cap is delivering hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars' worth of savings. I will go through them. Some destinations already had capped airfares. In communities that had capped airfares, there have been savings of \$133, for example, for residents of Port Hedland; for Kalgoorlie, \$205; for Kununurra, with one airline, \$76; and for Paraburdoo, \$99 with Qantas. However, there were flights to places where there were no residents' airfares. For residents in Kununurra, there was a potential saving of \$1 100 on an airfare; for Geraldton, a saving of \$298; and for Exmouth, a saving of \$564. All over the state, local residents can save hundreds of dollars per airfare, and the price is guaranteed. They are real savings of hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars over a year. When we announced the cap, there was a bit of scepticism out there because people did not believe that we could deliver such a program. We have already seen a massive increase in take-up of the fare cap scheme. For example, in Karratha in the December quarter, 8 512 residents took advantage of the regional airfare zone cap scheme—a 32 per cent increase on the previous quarter. In the six months from 1 July to the end of December, 66 000 airfares were sold under the regional airfare zone cap scheme.

As I said, I do not mind having a discussion and a debate, but I ask members to please recognise some of the initiatives the government has implemented that are saving hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars for regional Western Australians. Whenever I go to a regional town, the feedback is that it makes life so much easier. People can pop down and see family members, they can make that medical appointment, and they can enjoy special celebrations with family members in Perth that they probably would not have been able to attend before. It is a real initiative that is saving thousands of dollars. We have seen 66 000 airfares sold under that regional airfare zone cap initiative in its first six months. It is one of the projects that I am particularly proud of because I know that it really does save money and it can help to change lives and make it even more attractive to live in regional Western Australia.

Another two-zone fare cap applies in our public transport system. The Liberal and National Parties talk about vulnerable people. We implemented this public transport policy to support everyone in our community, particularly the vulnerable. Does the opposition know what that means? It means that if there is a good public transport system, people may not need a car, or an extra car in the household. Especially for families that have two or three cars, or for young people, cars are expensive to own and run. The total cost of having vehicles includes the cost of maintenance, the cost of petrol, the cost of depreciation and the interest paid on a car loan. Cars are expensive. What is one of the best things we can do in the suburbs to help people manage their budget? It is to support public transport. I am passionate about public transport because I think it is a cost-of-living initiative as much as anything else. The National Party has insulted and ridiculed Metronet and public transport for its entire existence. It does not believe in public transport and nor does the Liberal Party. When I think of public transport, I see it helping people manage their budget, stay connected and have access to opportunities they would have never had without the public transport system.

I am a massive supporter of public transport because it is not only infrastructure; it can deliver opportunities. The opposition continually criticises Metronet, but it will provide world-class transport for first home buyers moving to and living in new suburbs. That may mean households will not need two or three cars. They can get rid of one car, and that represents thousands of dollars in savings. I think some economists state that having a car cost between \$15 000 and \$20 000 a year. If we support public transport, we are helping people move around to access jobs, education opportunities —

**Ms S.E. Winton:** Cheaper education opportunities.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes—cheaper education opportunities. They can access medical appointments and centres. That is what public transport does, and that is why I am so passionate about it. Members opposite cannot stand up and talk about cost-of-living pressures and then insult investment in public transport. If they were serious about cost-of-living pressures, they would be serious about public transport.

We looked at how we are investing in our public transport. Some key feedback on surveys undertaken in the past was that affordability was becoming an issue. We looked at the zone structure and saw it would cost quite a bit particularly for people living in the higher zones, such as the member for Dawesville's electorate. I think people were paying up to \$11 each way on public transport into the city. I can understand why previously the equation of the cost between driving and travelling on public transport was not that clear-cut. When people were paying that amount for a public transport fare, they may have considered driving. With the two-zone fare cap, we have made it much cheaper for people in zones 3 to 9 to travel. We did the calculations. I think the calculations on travel from the member for Dawesville's electorate, based on someone travelling 230 days a year—so we took away weekends and annual leave—showed a saving of over \$3 000. That is an incredible cost-of-living outcome.

National Party members do not like public transport or they will say, "How about the regions?" They cannot say that now because we have a two-zone cap for regional flights as well. The two-zone fare cap for flights and public transport investment are saving people across the suburbs thousands of dollars.

It is important to highlight that strong financial management has allowed us to make these investments. The opposition does not want us to manage the finances, but, instead, to act like it did when it was in government and send the state bankrupt. That is not going to happen. Careful management of the finances allowed us to deliver things like the \$400 credit. Strong financial management allowed us to deliver initiatives like the airfare cap and the two-zone public transport fare cap. Without strong financial management, we could not deliver real savings to Western Australians.



I am glad the Leader of the Opposition is in the chamber. I want to reflect on the record of the Liberals and Nationals in government. They increased power prices by 90 per cent. They increased water, sewerage and drainage prices by 67 per cent. They increased all utility costs by significant amounts. They increased land tax, which, of course, would have flown through to rents. They increased power, water and sewerage prices, but never gave anything like an electricity credit back to the Western Australian public. We are managing the finances sensibly, we are making sure that we support the most vulnerable, and, with some specific initiatives, we are delivering savings of thousands of dollars.

Unfortunately, I had to pop out when the Leader of the Opposition stood to talk about a couple of issues in my portfolio. The Leader of the Opposition is happy that Georgiou Group got the Fitzroy River bridge contract. I am very happy that the Leader of the Opposition trusts them to deliver the project—fair enough. He had negative personal commentary on a number of issues. Regarding Westport, the Leader of the Opposition wants containers to move to Bunbury. Is that correct?

**Mr R.S. Love:** We want a diversity of options for Western Australians—Bunbury and the Pilbara.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** So the Leader of the Opposition wants to move the container port to Bunbury; is that right?

**Mr R.S. Love:** We want more options for the south west to get their produce out, yes.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** So is that the policy position?

**Mr R.S. Love:** It is my view that we could work towards that.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** It's hard looking for a policy—you nearly got one out.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** He nearly got one.

Several members interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** It could be a policy. If the Leader of the Opposition does not want to build a container port in Kwinana, it is up to him.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Leave it where it is.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The member for Cottesloe reckons we should leave it where it is. What is the position: the container port in Bunbury or leave it where it is?

Several members interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** You guys can have a chat and come back to us and tell us what the policy position is.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** Linear thinker.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Linear thinker—honestly! I was thinking about the member for Cottesloe this morning. I felt sorry for him a bit because he is always by himself and no-one from his side talks to him. I thought: Jeez, imagine being like that. Then I thought I should be nicer to him but he came in and said that sort of stuff. Honestly, why would he do that? The member's own side does not talk to him. I actually feel a bit sorry for him. But he came in here and called me names, so I cannot feel too sorry for him. A linear thinker—I have never been called that before.

As my colleague just pointed out, there was a 300 per cent increase in TAFE fees under the previous government. Now we have the National Party wanting a new full container port and the Liberal Party not wanting to move it.

On regional roads, the Leader of the Opposition said that we need to develop the Outback Way and Tanami Road. We are doing that. We have secured the funds for those projects and will deliver those upgrades. Again, we are doing things that the former government failed to do.

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Pardon?

**Mr R.S. Love:** Our colleagues in Canberra funded it.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The Leader of the Opposition has no idea. He sits there being negative and awful, and never gives any credit.

**Mr R.S. Love:** I know that the Liberals and Nationals in Canberra enabled most of the projects that you're now working on through the funding that they gave.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** The Leader of the Opposition never gives us any credit. How come the previous government did not get any?

**Mr R.S. Love:** Because there is now a Labor government and we don't have a relationship with them.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** No. This is my point: there was a Liberal–National government —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Break glass—there was a Liberal–National government in Canberra when members of the opposition were in government. How come they did not get it?

Several members interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** There was a federal Liberal–National government when the opposition was in power, and it did not get anything. We won and we get things, and somehow it is all the doing of the federal government. If the federal government were so generous and wanted to give us things, how come the opposition did not get them when they were in government? How come they did not get money for the Tanami upgrade?

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** How come they did not get money for the Outback Way, Albany ring-road, Bunbury Outer Ring Road or for the Great Northern Highway upgrade? They got nothing!

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent):** Minister, are you still welcoming interjections?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I do not mind.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Okay; that is all right.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I think it shows how sensitive the Leader of the Opposition is to this point. That glass jaw — Several members interjected.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Members opposite sit there, and every time that we say that we secured funding from the previous federal government, they say, “Oh, it’s all them.” Why did members opposite not do it? Why did they not secure any funding? Do members know why? It was because they did not do any work. What did the opposition do? They put all their eggs in one basket. Do members remember what that basket was? It was the Perth Freight Link, which was the only project that members opposite focused on.

**Mr P. Papalia:** Which never got a cent. It was all contingent. It was all contingent liability! You got bought off with a mirage!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Yes. It was contingent liability. That is what the opposition did. It did not actually focus on any other project. It had all its eggs in one basket.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Move on.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** I am going to talk about the Perth Freight Link for the next half-hour, given how rude you are. Let us go through it.

Members opposite did not secure any funds from their colleagues. They would not talk to each other. Let us look at all the projects we secured funding for. Let us go through the north. We got funding for the Tanami, the Outback Way; Great Northern Highway; Wiluna–Meekatharra Road; the Bunbury Outer Ring Road; Tom Price Manuwarra Red Dog Highway; and the Albany ring-road, and, more importantly, we secured hundreds of millions of dollars for regional road safety. Again, these are projects that members opposite will never give us credit for. They live in this bubble of negativity in which everything we do is bad and somehow you guys are the experts on everything. Out there, the public do not even know who you are.

However, it is good that the member came back. Honestly, this was a motion that was awful to watch. There were three lame contributions, and we will hear a couple more. This is a government delivering on all fronts. As I said, all across the government, we are supporting the most vulnerable, tackling cost-of-living pressures and supporting jobs through our enormous training infrastructure programs. As I said, I seriously think that someone should ask to reduce private members’ time to two hours as you guys cannot fill three hours—or when you do, it is so exceptionally boring that we all want to disappear.

Anyway, I think I have demonstrated how this government takes the issues of the cost of living and delivering services to the vulnerable seriously, and, more importantly, it supports strong economic growth to create jobs and make sure all Western Australians can get ahead in the state.

**DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe)** [5.53 pm]: I rise to join this debate. I am glad to have the opportunity to join the debate after the Minister for Transport. I was certainly keen to make a few comments that are relevant to the Minister for Transport, but I am assuming that buffet night is on and it is perhaps time to leave the chamber early. I will go through the minister’s comments because it was a fascinating contribution to this debate on the cost of living. If this is the substantive argument from the government, what a complete failure by the government! Members opposite come first up with these excuses for things: “The thing with housing is that it is a hot market.” Who is to blame for the lack of labour in the state of Western Australia? It is this Labor government. Remember. The Labor government came in during its first term and it was so clever that it reduced the skilled migration categories from 178 to 18—was it, Leader of the Liberal Party?

**Ms L. Mettam:** Yes.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I think it was 178 to 18. The Labor government took Perth out of the regional migration scheme, even though leading figures in the construction sector said that it would do two things—one, it would cripple the supply of unskilled labour that is critical and underpins the construction sector, and, two, it would cripple the

ability for overseas students to come into the state and gain employment because they relied on those categories for employment. That is why. The government then doubled-down during COVID, despite the best advice from this side of the house, and stopped everyone from coming into the state, including doctors and nurses! Imagine stopping doctors and nurses from coming into the state during a global health pandemic. It was fair enough to stop backpackers or people coming over for an idle twenty-first birthday party, but it stopped doctors and nurses from coming into the state! Of course, the government also stopped all that skilled labour, whether it was police or others, from coming into the state.

**Mr D.J. Kelly** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** Member for Cottesloe, are you taking interjections?

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** I am not, because it is wasting my time. Thank you.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, the member for Cottesloe is not taking interjections. We will hear his message in silence, thank you.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. I have limited time, but I am otherwise happy to go to the members' bar and have a chat.

I will say that it was members opposite who stopped labour coming into the state and caused the problem. It now likes to blame the problem —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members! The member for Cottesloe is not taking interjections.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** We had the minister talking about the government supporting household budgets with their election bribes. Let us be very clear about when those payments were made. In terms of cost of living, they were made when the inflation rate was one per cent going to two per cent. Now the inflation rate is what—six, seven or eight per cent? There are no cost-of-living relief measures now, not when the cost of living is going through the roof. Rather, it was timed just before the state and federal elections. But it was fascinating to hear the minister's enthusiasm that everyone appreciated that \$1 000. It did occur to me that I can imagine when the Premier was up at Nigel Satterley's house at the \$1 000-a-bottle wine tasting evening, perhaps Nigel Satterley said, "Premier, thanks very much for that \$1 000 that I got because, you know what, Premier; that will cover the cost of one bottle of wine tonight!" Maybe that was the discussion the minister was thinking about when she said that everyone was happy with it. We on this side of the house said that we agree with relief, but we wanted to see targeted relief to households. That is why this side of the house suggested that this government should put \$300 million towards not-for-profit agencies to help people struggling and really in need—not people who live in \$10 million houses who have \$1 billion in the bank and can afford to shout the Premier and others to \$1 000-a-bottle wine tasting evenings. It should go to people who are really struggling.

I will give the government full credit on the Activ decision. I thoroughly support it. That was a fantastic decision. It is not that the government does not do anything good. It was a great decision; I really appreciate it. At least a significant part of Activ is in my electorate, and I know the importance of it. Well done, minister. The regional airfare zone caps were well received by people in the community, and I am happy to recognise and congratulate the minister on that. I am fascinated by Metronet. I have used this analogy before, and I apologise, but it comes to mind every time I think about it. When I think about the Minister for Transport, I think of *Mandrake the Magician*. For those who are old enough to remember, *Mandrake the Magician* could gesture hypnotically and get anyone to do what he wanted them to do. He could convince people he was a lion or, I do not know, a prize-fighter—whatever it was. I am beefing up the minister. The minister clearly has a hypnotic capacity on her colleagues in cabinet because she can get them to commit any amount of capital to her projects! As I recollect, something like 43 per cent of the capital budget is going into Metronet. This is where the magical part comes in—convincing cabinet to do that when there are other critical capital priorities, which I will talk about, facing the state. On top of that, despite the fact that these great projects are billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule, the minister goes into cabinet a year ago, gestures hypnotically again and her colleagues then commit to another \$2 billion to upgrade the Armadale line. We have said on this side that once the government commits to those projects electorally, no side can go against them and, in the fullness of time, those projects are needed. But there are capital projects that would actually help the state. I will not go into great detail, but I am especially focused on the Oakajee strategic industrial area project, which would literally provide thousands of jobs in the midwest and secure future prosperity for the state. When the government has money, surely that is a high priority.

I noticed the other day that the Premier is more enthusiastic about the Metronet project. I would have thought that the Minister for Transport would have announced the first laying of the rail line for the Metronet project, or at least respond to a Dorothy Dixier in the Parliament or do a small ministerial statement in question time, which seems to be the case these days. But the Premier got up and stole the minister's thunder on that announcement. Then the minister was reduced to a storybook exercise around the Liberal Party's —

**Ms S. Winton** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The member for Cottesloe has made it very clear that he is not taking interjections.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** The Minister for Transport was reduced to a storybook exercise on what the Liberal Party achieved.

There are other capital projects that this government could focus on in the next budget. An issue I raised in a grievance to the minister is that of the enormous traffic congestion in my electorate at Stirling Highway and Curtin Avenue. I invite any member here to go to Mosman Park Primary School. I doubt that they have a school in their electorate that is as run-down as that school. It includes a school for profoundly deaf children. It has three times the metropolitan average number of Aboriginal kids going to the school—six per cent—and a very large cohort of kids who come from underprivileged households because there is a high concentration of state housing in the area. Good proposals have been put forward to upgrade the school. I hope this budget includes something to do with that.

The other thing I heard the minister boast about was the great financial management of this government. What a joke! The only thing that has happened is the iron ore price has gone from \$US55 a tonne up to \$US160 a couple of years ago and has been at \$US120 over the last year. That is what has happened. On top of that, there was the federal Liberal coalition government's outstanding work by, initially, Senator Dean Smith, then Hon Mathias Cormann and then Hon Scott Morrison in the time that he was Treasurer. They organised the GST fix for this state; it was not the Premier or the Treasurer or the backbenchers in the Labor Party. That top-up alone has delivered almost \$5 billion of additional revenue into the state coffers. There is also the royalties. I think that last time the royalties delivered an extra \$6 billion into the budget. Therefore, every single penny in the government surplus is due predominantly to the GST fix, the increase in iron ore prices and some good exchange rate movements. That is what has made the difference. It is a farce. Government members come in here talking about the great job they have done managing the state. It is purely because of an income increase, which they have had nothing to do with, and despite their best efforts at bankrupting the state with Metronet, they are not delivering other areas.

Households in Western Australia face enormous challenges. Inflation is creeping up at over eight per cent, and that is an enormous challenge for households to face. If we look at what this government has done about it, we see that in 2017, electricity was 26.5¢ a kilowatt hour and it is now 30.06¢. That is an increase of 13.5 per cent, which is way above inflation over that time. It is fascinating hearing—it is not the rewriting; although, it is if it is in *Hansard*—the retelling of history. We had the great Gallop government reform of the electricity sector whereby it took one government agency and divided it into four, then, lo and behold, prices went up. The Liberal Party came into government to a catastrophic situation. Before Gallop left, he had planned price increases of 10 per cent a year over 10 years. That is what the Liberal–National government had to face when it came into power. Again, the Gallop government had held back increases to water charges and power charges, which were way below the cost of recovery, and there was a catastrophic budget situation that had to be fixed. That was the situation, that was the story and that is what *Hansard* will record from my contribution. That is the truth of the matter.

Government members love to retell history and spin it in some way, but it was an absolutely disastrous change, particularly dividing the electricity corporations into four parts with four boards, four sets of CEOs —

**Ms M.J. Davies:** It got re-merged.

**Dr D.J. HONEY:** Yes, absolutely. What a joke!

That is what caused that. Under this government, we see massive increases in costs. In the 2017 budget, the government announced all its increases would be a cumulative total of 29.7 per cent in four years. Some of that was held back because of the COVID pandemic. But let us not pretend. Although the minister says that the government gave a \$400 rebate and therefore did not increase charges this year, all the underlying fees and charges went up. Guess what? Next year, there will be all the increases from this year plus all the increases for next year. That is what we will have. All the underlying fees and charges have gone up, so it was only temporary relief, as I have said, timed entirely to coincide with the federal election to help get Labor across the line, which it did by just a nose. But there have been enormous increases.

Look at the massive hike in the electricity daily supply charge. The Minister for Transport talked about vulnerable households and how the government has helped those vulnerable households. One thing that no-one can escape from is the daily supply charge. A lot of people are fastidious at turning off lights and minimising the use of electricity. What happened to the daily supply charge? It increased from 48.6¢ to 107.8¢. That is a 117.5 per cent increase in the daily supply charge. No household could escape that. No vulnerable household that the minister claims the government is supporting could escape that.

What will we see in the future with the absolute failed management of the government's energy transition? We know that we are again staring down the barrel of massive price increases because of the way that transition has been mismanaged. The premature closure of the Collie power station will put an enormous strain on the system. The member for Moore outlined the unreliability of that system, and it will inevitably translate into a substantial price increase, and the minister still has not given us the plan.

I turn to the issue of water. Given the time, I have to focus on a couple of key areas. Do members remember the water guzzlers? Water guzzlers are big families. The data that we obtained showed that overwhelmingly families

who used more than 500 kilolitres of water are large families. I say to those members in the outer suburban seats, east and north of Perth, water guzzlers are large families in the outer suburbs. They were the people who were belted by an increase in charges, yet the increase was put as if it would punish people in the western suburbs. I will use the example of Nigel Satterley, given that he was the Krug supplier for the wine-tasting evening. Do members think that Nigel Satterley cares whether he uses 500 kilolitres, 1 000 kilolitres or 10 000 kilolitres? It is chump change to him, but those families struggling in the eastern and northern suburbs in those outer areas, on bigger blocks, where they use a lot of water—typically that is where a lot of larger families go because they have to save money, so they buy cheaper housing in the outer suburbs—are the people who got belted with it. For larger families, there was a massive increase of around \$1 000 on their water bill charges. Then there were tricks played with gross rental value rates and the like. We saw the metropolitan rate on charges related to gross rental value increase by 30 per cent, and for properties over \$25 000, those fees increased by 321 per cent.

This government has not helped the small person. We get the spin. If feeding families was based on the number of press releases a government has, the number of glossy events government members attend, or the number of times they have donned a hard hat and reopened the same Metronet station about 15 times, we would be in good stead. Instead, this government worries about the top end of town; it does not worry about people who are struggling, and it is failing to help those people in Western Australia.

**MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Training)** [6.10 pm]: I rise to address this motion. Perhaps with the exception of the last speaker, who did his best to rile us up, I refer to other contributions to this motion. I remind the house that the motion that we should be debating states —

That this house decries the McGowan Labor government for its failure to deliver key services and meet budget commitments ...

This debate is about cost-of-living pressures on Western Australian households. In fact, the discussion on the other side has ranged far and wide. It always amazes me. Members on the other side have managed to talk about an incredible range of issues such as freight movements, supply chain restraints, business confidence, cyclone Seroja and the like. I was a bit surprised at the wideranging contributions from the other side, but I think it demonstrates the lack of discipline and focus by members opposite on how they would manage some of these issues and how they would manage government if they were actually in office, God forbid.

I will talk about some of the things that we have done in the six years that we have been in office, because I am actually really proud of them. We acknowledge that these are difficult times for householders—there is no question about that—but we have provided an intelligent and disciplined approach to government, which has meant that we have got the finances significantly back on track, and credit agencies have rewarded that discipline with an improvement in their reckoning of how we are managing the finances. We managed a pandemic under the leadership of the Premier. He took good advice and made hard decisions. We saw a little glimpse from the member for Cottesloe of how he would have managed some of these approaches if he had been in office. As I understood it, he said that we should have kept the borders open during parts of the pandemic. He said that we should not have changed any of the migration settings at all early on, and then, during the pandemic, in fact, we should have opened the borders; that is what I heard him say.

As a result of a disciplined approach, we are now seeing record numbers of jobs in the market. Yes, that has pressures, but it means that not only are there jobs out there for Western Australians if they want them, but also people who are vulnerable and sometimes find it challenging to enter the labour force are actually able to get a job for the first time. That is quite an exciting possibility for people who would otherwise really struggle to get into the labour market in our state. As the Minister for Training, I am very focused on making sure that we are able to provide training opportunities to give people the best opportunity to get into the labour market.

The best thing that a state government can do for all Western Australians, particularly vulnerable Western Australians, is to manage the economy well, make sure there are jobs out there and make sure the finances are in a position whereby we can provide targeted cost-of-living relief, and that is what we have been doing. I will talk about some of the specific things that we have been able to do. I mentioned the training sector. Let us be honest: in 2017, the training sector was in a mess. I had watched this area quite closely because I was on the WA State Training Board for a number of years, including when the coalition was in power here, and things were going from bad to worse. In fact, there was a move to completely deregulate much of the vocational training sector. Under the previous opposition leader, we saw an increase in fees between 2013 and 2017. Some of those fees increased fivefold; it was a massive increase. We saw a plummeting of annual student enrolments in vocational training by over 25 000 enrolments. It was a massive signal to the Western Australian community that the government did not want them training in TAFE and other vocational training areas and was going to send signals accordingly. The fee hikes put TAFE out of the reach of ordinary Western Australians. We had to set about fixing that. That was not only bad for young people who were thinking about their future and people who were thinking about changing their jobs, but it was really bad for some of those sectors that really rely on vocationally trained workers for their supply of skilled labour—for example, early education and care. One of the big challenges we have in supplying workers to that sector is that they are not generally well paid, as we know, so if we ratchet up the course fees for people entering the sector,

they will not be able to afford to go into that sector. That is what happened under the previous Liberal–National government. We are still paying the price for it; we are still trying to get the message out there that there is fee relief. We are encouraging people to train and move into those sectors, particularly in regional areas.

When we came to office in 2017, we immediately froze TAFE fees so that students had cost certainty. Then we slashed fees by up to 72 per cent for 210 courses, particularly in priority areas. This was an immediate change to send the message to the Western Australian public that it was not business as usual; we wanted them to think about vocational training. In fact, there were some concerns from the other side of the chamber when we did that. The Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse, had some concerns about that freeze. In an article, she was quoted as saying —

“The previous Liberal-led Government implemented important reforms to make the TAFE sector more sustainable,” ...

That was how she put it. She did not want us to freeze and in some cases cut fees; she said that this might not be good for the TAFE sector. She said —

“While I have no issue with keeping TAFE fees low, as the shadow Minister for Small Business and Tourism I do have a concern with how the Government plans to pay for it.”

Guess what? We pay for it because we are good economic managers. The Premier; Treasurer is a good economic manager. As a government, we have been disciplined and careful in how we have managed the finances, and that means that we have paid for those fee freezes. We have paid for the reduction in fees. We have paid for the cooperation with our federal counterparts and have been able to offer Free in '23 for over a hundred courses this year. In fact, we have invested to the tune of \$320.5 million to make training more affordable so more Western Australians can access quality training for quality jobs. We have invested \$320.5 million. It is a massive contribution. I would be interested to hear what the other side has to say about its record on vocational training when it was in office, and also what it would do if it came to office. What would the opposition do about vocational training? What is its policy to make sure that local people are training up to be able to walk into the jobs that are out there in Western Australia? Apprenticeships, traineeships and enrolments in vocational training have reached record highs compared with pre-pandemic levels, and that is largely driven by the significant investment from this government—that is, lower fees for students and employer incentives. As I said, there is the Free in '23 initiative, which provides fee-free training in over 130 courses and skill sets across high-priority areas like the care sector, IT, cybersecurity, agriculture construction, hospitality and tourism. They are crucial areas that people can get qualifications in, or just get a taster for if they are not sure whether they want to move into certain industries. Women and young people are making the most of these fee-free training opportunities. Women make up two-thirds of enrolments and young people make up over 40 per cent of those enrolments. That is really exciting. Maximising the participation of women in the workforce is crucial. We are sending the signal that we want them in these training areas and jobs. Two-thirds of those fee-free courses have gone to women, and over 40 per cent of those to young people. That is incredibly exciting. Finally, with regard to the records in training—which I am really proud of, being part of this government and now being the Minister for Training—in 2021 publicly funded course enrolments reached 150 000 in WA, which is the highest ever recorded. Those enrolments remain historically high. Apprenticeships and traineeships continue to be a popular choice in Western Australia, with over 11 000 people completing an apprenticeship or traineeship in 2022. That is 11 000, up 13 per cent from the previous year and something we should be really proud of. We are doing the hard work, we are managing the finances, we are giving people training opportunities, and people are enrolling in those courses, and that is really exciting.

I also want to talk about water fees and charges because it is something I have followed closely. The member for Cottesloe probably led with his chin on this by saying that our water pricing policies had been in error. In fact, the member might be interested to know that the water efficiency pricing model has resulted in high residential water users in Perth now using 1.6 gegalitres less water per annum. That is 1.6 gegalitres less water per annum, saving \$7.4 million in billed charges in 2020–21. As a result of the signal being sent to those users to reduce their usage, there is \$7.4 million overall less in billed charges. Just so the member is clear, 1.6 gegalitres of water is 1.6 Optus Stadiums of water; it is a huge amount of water. The member for Cottesloe should remember what his lot did with water prices. 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. I will just repeat that: in the first six years of the Liberal–National government water prices went up 52.8 per cent; for us it has been 18 per cent. In the 2020–21 financial year we saw the first reduction in the average household water bill for more than a decade. I am proud of that. I am proud to be part of a government that has focused on keeping water bills affordable. I remember that the former Leader of the Opposition and previous Minister for Water, the member for Central Wheatbelt, used to squirm a little bit when she was reminded that the previous government had a mean-spirited approach to families doing it tough, restricting more than 200 families a month having difficulty paying their bills. Now, the average number of Water Corporation customers a month who have their water access restricted is 33. Under the previous government 200 families a month had their water restricted —

**Dr A.D. Buti:** A month?

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** It was 200 families a month because they were having difficulty paying their fees. As a result of a focus on understanding the reason that people were having difficulty paying their fees and providing a careful and considerate approach to fee relief by intervention and understanding, that average has now reduced to 33 a month, which is an 85 per cent decrease. If people are having trouble with overdue accounts, interest charges do not apply to concession card holders, those in payment arrangements, customers experiencing financial hardship or Aboriginal communities. With those support measures this government has put in place, we have significantly reduced the number of customers who owe interest and the total amount of interest owed.

A number of hardship measures have been put in place under our government. There is the Medical Assist allowance for customers who qualify, for instance those who require the continence aids payment scheme or are on home dialysis and need higher water usage. An allowance of up to 30 000 litres of water, free of charge, is applied to every two-monthly bill, saving customers nearly \$400 annually. The Start Over package assists customers in hardship with long-term outstanding debt. The Water Corporation will match a customer's payment over a two-year period when they clear any outstanding debt, so it is a motivation to clear some outstanding debt so the Water Corporation matches their payments. There is a Time Assist program for customers with a consistent payment history who experience a recent event resulting in them being unable to pay. Bills can be put on hold for three months. The Water Assist program matches eligible customer payments dollar for dollar for up to \$150 a month. There is also a range of other programs such as water audits, help for bill shock, payment for a plumber, referrals to financial counsellors, a partnership program with the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, assistance with the water services code of practice for people experiencing family violence and the Waterwise Public Housing Project. There are a lot of specific projects that are really targeted to assist people who need it.

Despite what the opposition says while it is in the cheap seats, when it had the opportunity to put these sorts of policies in effect when it was in power, it did not do it. It did not do the work to understand what those customers in hardship needed and did not provide a considered and compassionate approach.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** I want to mention another example of a compassionate approach, and that is the assistance that the Water Corporation has put in place under our government to people affected by the Fitzroy Crossing floods. This is dedicated assistance to those affected by the floods. The Water Corporation designed a customer assistance package that has been automatically applied to the accounts of Fitzroy Crossing and Camballin customers, waiving water and service charges across two billing cycles, including existing charges and any outstanding debts. In Fitzroy Crossing that assistance has been given to 311 customer accounts, with an estimated total of over \$463 000 given to those customers. In Camballin 46 customers have benefited, at an estimated total of \$8 000. Well over \$470 000 worth of assistance has been given to those customers. In fact, customers in that area have been given an extra water allowance to clean up the effects of the floods, as they would need extra water to wash out their houses and to clean up. That has not been well taken up. They all have an extra 70 kilolitres of water allowance —

**Dr D.J. Honey:** They've got too much water there already, minister!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Yes, that is right.

**Ms S.E. Winton:** That's right; make light of it!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** It was an idea —

**Ms S. Winton:** You are clueless! Make light of it!

**Dr D.J. Honey:** You are just rude.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister! Member!

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister! Members!

Several members interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Perhaps the member for Cottesloe was again a little tin eared in his comment about the people in Fitzroy who were affected. This was a very real issue for them.

**Ms S.E. Winton** interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister!

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** It was a considered approach to give them some free water. The Water Corporation has been making an effort to get out to those households and ensure that customers understand that they have a free —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

Several members interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** Acting Speaker —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members! Minister! The Minister for Training has the call.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** The Minister for Community Services has been up to the Kimberley a number of times and met the people who have been affected by the floods.

Several members interjected.

**Ms S.F. McGURK:** I make the point to the Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for North West Central and the member for Cottesloe, who are all feigning that they did not mean to offend anyone in Fitzroy Crossing, that the Minister for Community Services has been up there a number of times since the floods and understands the difficulties that people are going through. It was a practical measure of assistance to give them an extra water allocation so that they could clean, and a lot of people have not understood that. The member for Cottesloe made a joke in particularly poor taste and that was the nature of the exchange that has just occurred. We did not need the contributions from the member for North West Central and the Leader of the Liberal Party. They were not listening to the debate very well. I will move on.

This government has continued to provide considered assistance and has worked hard with the community sector. As the former Minister for Community Services, I know that well. We have worked hard with the sector to not only provide additional assistance, but also reform areas of work within the community services sector, whether it was in general community services, responding to family and domestic violence, providing child protection or assisting vulnerable families. What the Leader of the Opposition said—I am trying to remember the expression that was used; it might have been “smoke and mirrors”—was quite offensive, because workers in the Department of Communities and in the community services sector have done a lot of work over the last six years that has effected real change for families. Opposition members brush over any sort of improvements that have been made and the millions of dollars that have been put in to assist vulnerable families as though they do not matter because they are unaware of them. They do not take the time to understand what a difference some of the work that the workers in the community services sector and in the Department of Communities makes in assisting families. I ask the member to take the time to understand some of that work and to not brush over some of the improvements that have been made in that area. Those improvements have been well recognised by the community services sector as an effort made by this government to properly understand what reform is needed in community services to provide an intelligent approach to assisting vulnerable families. I am very confident that under the stewardship of the current Minister for Community Services; Child Protection; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence that reform work will continue. It is complex, difficult, not easily understood by the public and often not easily understood by the media. I expect that members of this place, including senior members of the opposition, would take the time to understand those issues. They refuse to acknowledge the contributing factors of alcohol on communities. The difficult efforts that are being made to start to constrain access of alcohol in some of those communities is very telling on the capacity of the opposition to really start to deal with some of the more complex issues in our community, particularly in regional areas.

I cannot remember how many times members of the opposition have asked to debate the compounding cost-of-living pressures or issues that are going on in our community. We are not unaware of the pressures faced by average Western Australians. When the Minister for Transport was speaking, she talked about the pressures of interest rates and inflation in particular in our community. We are not unaware of those issues. Do we hear a constructive policy from the other side? Do we hear practical ideas from the other side about what should occur? No, we do not. We never hear those things. We hear simplistic responses. We hear the member for Cottesloe saying that a primary school in Mosman Park is perhaps one of the schools in our state that is struggling the most.

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [6.36 pm]: I rise to support the motion. Everyone knows that I will obviously speak from a regional perspective. I want to say from the outset that I do not deny good things are happening, but I will continue to stand up, given that I live and breathe what happens on the ground in the regions, and raise issues on behalf of my constituents. That is what I am here to do.

In relation to living costs and the issues faced by people across the state, it is tough for everyone. It is well known that it is tough for people in Perth, in the metropolitan area, but it is also tough for people in the regions because of the nature of where they live, smaller populations and the geographical landscapes. For those smaller populations in remote locations, a small change in the operating landscape, such as population loss, will have a massive impact on what happens to small businesses in particular. It will have an enormous flow-on effect and greatly impact economic development and prosperity of services, community morale and mental health. There are other issues associated with the rising cost of living and doing business in the regions.

The member for Cottesloe mentioned the borders during COVID. In the regions, that affected the skilled occupation list and the people, chefs and the like, who could not get through, which caused issues for businesses that had no workers and were not able to fully open their businesses. I wanted to clarify that.



Tourism is a major industry in our state. It has been impacted by rising costs. When people think tourism, they think cafes, accommodation and tours, but everyone in tourism is affected—plumbers, butchers and people working in councils. Whoever they are and in whatever location, they are all contributing to tourism. While communities and people across the state are feeling the pinch due to the cost of living, doing business is becoming extremely difficult. There is no disputing that those in the regions are going to be hit harder. That is just a product of being in the regions.

The Minister for Transport mentioned the airfare caps, which have had a significant impact. I do not deny that. The issue now is that a lot of flights are being cancelled and the airlines do not have the staff, which is a common situation across the regions. That is causing frustration and people will take alternative modes of transport or drive, if they can. For me, that says that maybe we need to look at doing something to upskill pilots, baggage handlers or whomever it is that the airline services need to get those planes back into the air.

I have noticed other things in the regions. For example, regional managers are a long way from the towns and the service centres, which, whether or not people want to believe that, has a massive impact. Being 1 400 kilometres or 1 000 kilometres from executive directors of departments makes it really hard for people who live in the regions to connect with people and decision-makers on the ground. It is a geographical issue and there is no connectivity between a lot of these towns. People have to come to Perth to see a person from another town who may be looking after a department. The regional manager problem is an issue that keeps being raised and I think for good reason.

Some of these issues that we are facing obviously have been touched on today, including housing and workers' accommodation. That flows through to higher rents. The fewer houses there are, the higher the rents are and the greater the staff shortages. I mentioned this before in the house. Lots of locations, in the north in particular have two-speed economies. People earning money in the mining sector can afford the high rents and people working in cafes cannot. That is creating a lot of angst. Coupled with the worker shortage is the child-care issue in these spaces. People do not have the family support or people around them so they cannot enter the workforce. They are capable, but they are unable to do it.

Some of the costs that are really impacting, particularly in the north west, relate to insurance. Lots of people have come to me and said it is impossible for them to afford it. A lady in Onslow is looking at selling because she cannot get insurance. That is the next step for her. Insurance is a real issue, as it is for tourism. A couple of businesses in my electorate need to close because they cannot get the insurance that they need to cover their business. These are some of the battles with costs that people are facing. Horseriding businesses and adventure tourism are really struggling with that, and I think that will only get worse.

Increased freight costs is another common factor that is popping up regularly. People are finding more and more that they are becoming price-takers. People will pay for products and services only at a certain price point, but the cost of fuel and transport is getting to a point at which businesses are finding it difficult to pass it on to consumers. That is also the same with the increased fuel and travel costs for residents who are living in those regions. They are needing to travel more. There is no public transport in the regions, so they are relying on their cars. Some of the seniors and people with disability have been seeking some kind of help with their licence fees, and if they need to get a farm-plated car licence, they have to take it to Geraldton, which is a 500-kilometre trip each way. People are faced with these added costs, including ones resulting from supply chain issues, which are still an issue, particularly in the north.

The minister touched on water costs in the regions. There is a big disparity between a business in Perth and a like business in the north. I think water per kilolitre costs three times more in the north, which makes it really difficult for people to remain sustainable in that place with the different costs that they are trying to structure. Businesses are attracting people and tourists from the south who are used to paying a certain price and they are unaware of the difference and they are thinking it is the same price for everybody.

One of the things that the member for Roe touched on was sport, which is enormously important, particularly in regional areas. I am concerned that the cost-of-living increases will result in sporting teams and kids being squeezed out of playing sport. I am talking about a lot of kids in a lot of different spaces. The KidSport vouchers are fantastic. I heard about a group that travelled to the WA Country Swimming Pennants carnival in Northam. The group received a grant to take that cohort of kids to the carnival, but the grant amount needs reviewing because kids in smaller towns are struggling to raise the money that will allow them to travel to competitions, which is really important for their development and the development of sport in our state. For example, a gymnastics group in Carnarvon is struggling to find somewhere to house their club, which has 100 children and a very active group of volunteers. These are the kinds of groups that we need to work with to find ways to nurture kids sport, whether that be through grants or extending kids sport, because there has been a decrease in the number of kids and sporting clubs as the population in regional towns becomes diluted.

Internet connection and communication are always a challenge, and that is something we need to continue to work on in the regions, particularly in the space of education because students in remote areas rely on the internet and communication. That is also the case for businesses. We need to make sure that businesses remain connected. Some businesses in towns in the north spend a lot of time offline and that can significantly impact on their business bottom line.

There is also the housing issue and the worker accommodation issue. Rental prices are increasing and there has been a reduction in the number of available houses. Airbnb is clearly an issue in a lot of country towns because it is taking rental properties out of the market. Although there is a need for it in the towns that do not have a lot of accommodation, it is a balancing act. Many businesses have battled through. Some are facing the prospect of closing because of the costs and pressures that they are facing. Worker accommodation is a huge issue. Kalbarri and Exmouth are struggling to find worker accommodation, which has yet to eventuate. The lack of housing up and down the north coast is significant. Like I said before, people in the regions do not expect railways and massive stadiums, but they do expect infrastructure and services that will help the ongoing development, vitality and growth of communities in the regions. The north of the state is a rich area, but there is a definite need to continue to nurture those areas.

Some of the shortfalls in these communities have become evident with events such as the solar eclipse, which everyone is clearly aware of. There is a need to help with that event because the shire has a very small rate base and limited ability to provide the needed infrastructure. We all understand that repairing the Fitzroy River Bridge is a massive project that will take some time to get up and running. It is one of the fallouts from the floods—this is becoming more prevalent in the conversations that I have had—because it is the main tourism artery to the east coast and it will be cut off for another year. It is not just businesses on the west side of the Kimberley that have been affected; the tourism nodes all the way down the coast to Esperance and beyond rely on the winter trade that comes from people travelling along that artery. Some businesses are nervous about increasing costs and the potential to attract workers without other avenues and marketing plans in place.

Infrastructure and services on the Wiluna–Meekatharra road are really important. Recently, there was another fatality on that road. It is becoming busy, and that is becoming more prevalent now that we do not that artery up the top. A lot of mining companies are cranking up in the area and that is becoming a significant issue for the region.

I want to make mention of the volunteers in the region—what a fabulous job they do—including the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the helicopters, which are the lifeline for the regions. There is a massive reliance on volunteers and, coupled with the staff of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, they do an incredible job, which sometimes goes unnoticed. We visited the Royal Flying Doctor Service site the other day. My family has used the service three or four times over a number of years. It has been a lifeline.

I think that the Kalbarri State Emergency Service volunteers are coming up to their second-year anniversary. They have done and are still doing an incredible job. The SES volunteers from the north west and across the state rallied for that, as they did for the Kimberley and every other disaster that we have had in the north, and we have had a few. I want to thank that group and recognise the contribution it makes. We need those groups to continue to be supported. They become essential the further one gets from a town.

The health system is obviously a problem for a lot of people in the regions. I know a lady who moved to Paraburdoo and the doctor left two weeks later. She went there to take up a job on the basis that there would be a doctor in the town because her daughter is anaphylactic and, on the second round when she has an attack, needs a doctor. The doctor is now located in Tom Price, which is 50 to 80 kilometres away. These issues are not as prevalent in the city because people can drive down the road to an alternative medical facility. It is the same with maternity services. We had someone taken from Carnarvon to Bunbury to have their baby off country. They were completely lost and struggled in an environment in which they had no family support.

I urge the government to work together on some of these things. Although we have had conversations in here today that have been robust, sometimes it is about taking things on board and listening to what is happening on the ground. I know personally that if you are connected to the ground, sometimes things are not what they appear to be. I urge people to understand that we need to recognise we are a very big state that is the equivalent of three or four states. The landscapes are very different and the requirements are very different, as are the costs. The cost of living is an issue across the state, but it is exacerbated in regional areas purely because of where a town sits.

It is important that the government supports regional businesses and communities that have underpinned the success of tourism and the resources sector in the north. From where I sit, it is about continuing to fight for the regions to make them a better place. It is about getting better services and facilities into those regions for them and their communities to grow.

**MS S.E. WINTON (Wanneroo — Minister for Early Childhood Education)** [6.52 pm]: I would like to make a short contribution on this motion for a couple of minutes, taking us up to seven o'clock. It is a most arrogant motion that the government will obviously not be supporting. I will start with the member for North West Central's comments in her summary about the government taking on board some of the suggestions made by the opposition. The point is: the opposition does not ever make any suggestions. The point is: all the opposition does is whinge and whine. Opposition members are devoid of any ideas, strategies or policies to actually deal with what are some challenging issues for people in Western Australia. That is absolutely clear.

At the outset, I also want to take issue with the flippant remarks made by the former Leader of the Opposition.

Several members interjected.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** They were flippant and the member showed his form in pretending to —  
Several members interjected.

*Point of Order*

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I note that the minister has been on her feet for less than 60 seconds and there has been no let-up in inane interjections from the opposition.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** The point of order is not upheld. Minister for Community Services, if you could address your comments through the chair, that would be great. Minister, are you taking interjections?

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** No, I am not. I have only about five minutes.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The minister is not taking interjections, so we will hear her in silence.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** Thank you; I really appreciate your protection, Madam Acting Speaker.

I do not have much time. I will start by saying that I took exception to the comments of the former Leader of the Opposition in the debate tonight.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** What comment?

**Mr R.S. Love:** Again, are you talking about the member for Central Wheatbelt?

**Ms R. Saffioti:** Let her finish!

**Mr R.S. Love:** Who is she talking about?

*Point of Order*

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I point out that the opposition is ignoring your ruling in a sexist manner. I ask you to direct them to comply with your ruling and cease this sexist behaviour.

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** Further to the point of order, I was simply trying to gain clarity from the minister on her feet as to whom she is talking about, because the former Leader of the Opposition has not made an address.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mrs L.A. Munday):** Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. I understand.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** I apologise; I am referring, of course, to the former Leader of the Liberal Party. It is hard to know who is the opposition leader in this state! My confusion is reflected in the broad sentiment of Western Australians, who have no idea what an alternative to the McGowan government looks like in this place.

In reference to the former Leader of the Liberal Party's comments tonight, he has form in this place for making embarrassing and patronising comments. Tonight in the debate, when the Minister for Water outlined how we are taking practical, real measures to support vulnerable people affected by the significant flooding in Fitzroy Crossing, the member for Cottesloe made a comment implying that they had enough water. Now, it might have been a bit of a joke from his perspective, but I can tell him that the people in Fitzroy Crossing would find that just as offensive as, or even more offensive than, I do.

**Dr D.J. Honey:** What a load of rubbish.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** You have got form for being patronising. On previous occasions that you have been patronising in this place, you have put it in *Hansard*. You stood up and eyeballed a minister and said, "I am going to patronise you", and then you went ahead and patronised them. This time, you tried to do it in a little bit of a cute way by being a bit flippant about it, but that does not take away from the fact that you are an embarrassment, you are a seat warmer and you really should vacate the space to allow the Liberal Party to bring some real talent into this place. Real talent is what you need, because for the last three hours of "Whinge Wednesday", the contributions made by members opposite bordered on—I cannot actually explain it! It was repeat, repeat, repeat. Their contributions were devoid of any policy ideas or solutions to some of the critical issues faced in this state.

The other comment of the former Leader of the Liberal Party that I took exception to was his suggestion that our good financial situation in this state is just a fluke—that it is just luck. No, it is not. All the economic commentators repeatedly said that we got our AAA rating back because of our prudent and disciplined financial management of this state. That is something that you guys do not know about. As a result of our responsible financial management—this is important—we can respond to issues as they occur. Our sound financial management allowed us to respond to a pandemic with expenditure of over \$11 billion, yet we are still in a sound financial position. How is that a fluke? It is called managing money really well. I know members opposite do not like to think that Labor governments can do that, but that is what is happening under the McGowan Labor government. When we have good financial management, it means that we can respond to issues as they occur. We can respond to the floods in the north by providing multimillion-dollar relief, in real financial ways, to support those people who have been displaced and will

continue to be displaced in the medium and longer term. We have the capacity to do that because we are disciplined in managing the books. We are not going to put it on the credit card. We are managing it in a responsible way. I would like to have talked more about the community services sector because it is a really critical part —

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** I can tell you that they would be just as offended as I am at the comments made over there.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Members!

**Ms S.E. WINTON:** The community services sector receives over \$1 billion in investment from the state government each year to provide critical services to vulnerable families and to support them with cost-of-living pressures. I am proud of the work that those in the community services sector do and I will continue to support them. I will not run them down when it is politically expedient to do so, as the former Liberal leader did by saying that community sector organisations were not doing their jobs properly. I will continue to back them in.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

## **BILLS**

### *Assent*

Messages from the Deputy of the Governor received and read notifying assent to the following bills —

1. Land and Public Works Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.
2. Animal Welfare and Trespass Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.
3. Road Traffic (Vehicles) Amendment (Offensive Advertising) Bill 2022.
4. Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2023.
5. Criminal Investigation Amendment (Validation) Bill 2023.

*House adjourned at 7.01 pm*

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