

APPROPRIATION (RECURRENT 2023–24) BILL 2023
APPROPRIATION (CAPITAL 2023–24) BILL 2023

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from 16 May.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [12.44 pm]: I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2023–24) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (Capital 2023–24) Bill 2023 as the lead speaker for the opposition. I do so by commencing with a vote of thanks to the hardworking people of Western Australia and the great industries in which they work and to all the hardworking folk across our state who support themselves, their families, their communities and the state. Your efforts have delivered a surplus of more than \$4 billion for both the state and federal governments. Your state and nation should be very appreciative of what you have achieved.

This government has brought down seven budgets; that is seven opportunities to deliver for the people who delivered for it. If we were to take a snapshot of life in Western Australia right now having had those seven budgets, what would it reveal? It would reveal a health system in crisis; housing shortages so dire that all but two regional centres have a rental vacancy rate of less than one per cent; social housing waitlists now years long, with 34 000 people waiting on homes; and lawlessness right across the state, with some towns crippled by crime, all of which is coupled with a dysfunctional corrective services system. For the last year, youth corrective services has been the source of much pain for the community. This government is unwilling to reconsider its disastrous management of Banksia Hill Detention Centre.

Communities impacted by cyclone Seroja are still waiting for support years on. Kimberley residents have been cut off for months due to flooding. It took the drenching downpours of tropical cyclone Ellie for the vulnerability of connectivity to communities in the Kimberley to be taken seriously. We hope it is taken seriously. My thoughts are with those who have been hit by either of those events. I hope that they get back on their feet as quickly as possible. I thank all those who have worked hard in the response. On Wear Orange Wednesday, I make particular note of the State Emergency Service and its members and all the great work they do right across our state.

In this wealthy state with billions of dollars in surplus, why do 116 000 kids live in food insecure homes? How can that be in a state as wealthy as Western Australia? How can this government tolerate a situation such as this? If one single fact should keep government members awake at night, it is those children who are at risk of going hungry. Western Australia has a new class of working poor. People with reliable jobs are working hard to support their families but are struggling to keep up. What action has the government taken? It has given another \$400 electricity credit across the board. What else has it done? It is responsible for an increase in household fees and charges; indeed, the cost of power, water and having a car have all gone up. The emergency services levy will rise by a whopping five per cent. What this government gives with one hand it takes with the other. Since coming to power in 2017, the McGowan Labor government has increased household fees and charges by \$1 030 annually; that is \$1 030 in additional costs to Western Australians, including those struggling to make ends meet.

Last Thursday we saw a Premier hell-bent on branding himself as the owner of this \$4.2 billion operating surplus. It was only when I asked a question without notice in this place that he paid tribute to the hardworking people of this state. This Premier; Treasurer and his government have forgotten that it is not really their surplus; it is public money. It belongs to the people of Western Australia—the hardworking public who have failed to gain any benefits from this budget. The opposition believes that a budget that fails to deliver for the people of Western Australia is a broken budget. We believe that Western Australians deserve more. This government has a habit of making promises it cannot and will not keep. We believe that Western Australia deserves better. The budget papers reveal that this government is preparing for a general operating surplus of \$4.226 billion in 2022–23, an increase of \$2.342 billion from the forecast at the midyear review, due in large part to increasing royalties. On top of those royalties and the payroll tax boom, the Premier has enjoyed the gift given by the former coalition government's GST deal, which has benefited the state immensely.

Even with this gift, he is failing to pay down debt and provide a community dividend. Since 2017, the McGowan Labor government has announced surpluses totalling \$18.491 billion. It is forecast that over the forward estimates, the government will receive an additional \$11.063 billion. In total, this brings the government's predicted surpluses to more than \$29 billion since it came to power, yet at the end of the forward estimates, net debt will increase to \$35.9 billion—\$4 billion more than the \$31.9 billion the McGowan government inherited in 2017.

Given the importance of the resources sector, it is very concerning to see that, according to the Fraser Institute, Western Australia has fallen from top position as the most attractive Australian jurisdiction for investment in resources. That may be a sign of growing concerns over federal Labor's introduction of a federal environmental protection agency and the calling in of previously approved projects, coupled with recent unforeseen changes to the petroleum resource rent tax. Industry investment in major gas fields is massive and long-lived. The uncertainty created by midstream taxation changes and the federal government's ham-fisted approach to gas pricing will do

nothing to encourage investment going forward. It may also be that this state government's haphazard approach to its so-called Streamline WA is catching up with it. Far from being the success claimed by the government, discussion with industry at all levels reveals the confusion generated during the machinery-of-government changes, along with capacity lost from departments such as the Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety and the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. This means that there is a complete disconnect between the government's rhetoric and a system plagued with time delays.

On 1 July we will see the rushed commencement of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021. Funding for the under-resourced local Aboriginal cultural heritage services will come too late to properly prepare them for their role. I suspect there will be an impact on every industry, every sector and every region. Inevitably, there will be delays to approvals and confusion. The lack of consideration on the timing of the act and uncertainty over any effects belated investment will have on the supporting structures of the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act are causing great concern across the board. LACHS, prospectors, explorers, miners, farmers, pastoralists, local governments and other land users will be negotiating and navigating their way through uncharted waters as a result of a rushed process that no-one can see working immediately and that will take a very long time to bed in. More time and more education is needed to allow for the introduction of the new regime and to avoid frustration for the custodians of cultural knowledge and other land users. Needlessly rushing this legislation through Parliament with no opportunity for thorough scrutiny and, likewise, rushing the regulations was a needless and unnecessary risk taken by the government. In the face of that, perhaps it is the case that investing in Western Australia has become less attractive. The impact of this government's unreliable hand is becoming more obvious. It may be that the sector has grown wise to the fact that the government makes promises that it does not always deliver.

Last year's budget promised to deliver \$9 billion in capital works, yet only \$7.2 billion worth was actually delivered. This demonstrates the government's inability to deliver its program. Take, for example, some of its signature projects. Yesterday, much was made of the announcement of the laying of track for the Yanchep train line extension. In 2020, this project was forecast to cost \$431 million; in last year's budget, it was costed at \$607 million, and in the current budget, it is costed at \$982 374 000. It has blown out by \$375 million-plus in the space of a year, and gone from a delivery date of late 2021 to uncertainty; it may be delivered sometime next year. Similarly, the Bunbury Outer Ring Road was first projected to cost \$852 million; in last year's budget, it had blown out to \$1.252 billion and it now sits at \$1.352 billion, with the project's scope substantially trimmed back so that instead of being a freeway, it will end up being largely a suburban road, with the introduction of roundabouts and the trimming of the flyovers that were originally planned. The Albany ring-road has blown out from \$175 million to \$215 million—a \$40 million cost blowout. The government needs to come clean on exactly what these projects cost and when they will be delivered, with full accounting for the expected cost. We have seen under this government an unwillingness to provide firm time lines for any project and an inability to meet whatever sketchy time frames it announces for each and every project.

However, the government making promises that it does not deliver is not exclusive to transport. The women's and babies' hospital has become a perennial budget announcement. In 2020, the Premier said funding was locked in with \$1.8 billion. In 2021, he again said it was locked in and a plan was released with an early design of the hospital. In 2022, the site was confirmed near Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. In May 2022, the language was slightly amended to say that the hospital money was now only set aside. Here we are, in 2023, when shovels were meant to be in the ground, but now we have a new plan and a new site, and the shovels are not there and work has not yet started. Somehow, the funds allocated remain at the original 2020 level, despite every other major capital project seeming to be hit with increasing costs—massive cost blowouts, in some cases. No further funding has been allocated to that project. Western Australians are now thinking, "We'll believe it when we see it." It is just not good enough.

When this Labor government came to power in 2017, its first order of business was to take a razor to the health budget, and it has been playing catch-up ever since. The overall investment in regional health is a pittance compared with what is needed, and major projects like new hospital developments or even a firm commitment to much-needed facilities, like the Geraldton radiation oncology unit, are lacking. Before the 2017 election, the government promised to redevelop Geraldton Health Campus. It is an indictment of the government that Geraldton and midwest residents have, for years now, voiced repeated concerns over the facility being at breaking point, only for their calls to be ignored. These residents have been given a car park so that they can sit out the front and wait—wait years for the McGowan Labor government to get its act together. The government originally set aside \$73.3 million for the project; it has now blown out to a staggering \$122.7 million. With the time line for completion well and truly blown out, and expressions of interest still being considered, the community has no reassurance about when the works will be done.

Prior to the budget being introduced on 1 May, the McGowan Labor government announced \$511 million to build social housing, but with no time frame for the commencement of works or any plan for how to actually get the job done. We believe that this is yet another empty promise. The delivery of housing projects is too important for our state to get it wrong. The government's inability to deliver is pushing our housing market to a cliff from which we will fall. While the Premier orders the commencement of public works and construction in every pocket of Perth,

he diverts the workforce and resources from private works, from housing, from young families, from businesses and from people aspiring to build. New housing approvals in this state are at the lowest levels in the country. Although approvals soared following the COVID building incentives, monthly approvals for private houses fell to 866 in January this year; in seasonally adjusted terms, that is the lowest number of approvals since mid-2012. In fact, there have been only five months with approvals lower than this number since 1990, and although it rose in February, the increase was by only 2.4 per cent.

In June 2020, at a time of a low number of building approvals, the Premier acknowledged that the housing sector was doing it tough and that we were facing a housing crisis. His response now is to tell people how lucky they are to live in a state with such a booming economy! While the plague of empty brick shells continues to push people to their limits—balancing rent and mortgages for years longer than intended—few new builds are being submitted or approved. What does this mean? It means that when the great chunk of houses currently under construction is finally completed, there will be a dearth of private investment in new housing. We are heading for an even greater period of scarcity and this state government is failing abysmally to plan for it.

We now see the government scanning the globe for workers to finish homes that remain unbuilt. On top of that, we face the problem of having no homes for those builders when they come, not to mention where we will house the builders we need for the new diversified industries that we hope Western Australia will potentially develop over the coming years. The worker shortage that we currently face has been looming since 2017 when the McGowan government took just weeks to tear up the existing skilled migration list, and Western Australia has not recovered since. Then came the pandemic and restrictions on international and interstate travel imposed by the state and federal governments, which certainly exposed our reliance on international workforces in health, police, hospitality, agriculture, construction and transport—our reliance across the board. Regional businesses are being forced to shut their doors because of this. The government's failure to address this worker shortage is impacting communities. This shortage has wound its way across the state and has contributed immeasurably to the challenges faced daily in those communities.

In many regional communities, housing shortages also come into play. Rising operating costs are now the number one concern for all businesses. Amongst these factors are higher labour costs, which, as they rise, result in a greater contribution to payroll tax. One way to assist would be to reform the payroll tax system. The Premier has largely ignored the opportunity; instead, he has opted to provide tax relief to the big end of town while taking for granted small and medium-sized businesses. Workforce challenges face the public sector just as they do the private sector; perhaps two of the most obvious being health and the police workforce. Again, it is even harder to find staff the further we go from the centre of Perth. A shortage of health service workers is putting many regional health services at risk. Pregnant women in Carnarvon are being left with no choice but to travel for almost five hours, or 1 000 kilometres, to Perth to receive planned birthing services. Wyndham Hospital remains at a limited operating capacity, with overnight services having no choice but to resort to an on-call basis. The health system is more dysfunctional than it was pre-pandemic. These are the words of a former hardworking midwife who was left with no choice but to leave the profession due to chronic shortages. As we noted, this shortage does not end with the health sector; our state is also short of police. At the current rate of resignations, we are reverting to 2015 numbers, despite the government's pronouncements around bolstering the police force. Meanwhile, communities, especially in the north of our state, are being ravaged by lawlessness and crime. Police are leaving in droves under the McGowan government, resulting in fewer police on the beat and a shrinking force. Resources directed to Operation Regional Shield leaves already stretched police resources in the city potentially exposed. WA Police Union president Mick Kelly said —

“We can't have additional numbers of our officers up in the Kimberley forever because that creates vacancies down here in the metropolitan area,” he said.

“And the police have lost 372 [officers] since the start of the year.”

These workforce shortages will obviously have an impact on crime. On the back of record levels of crime is also the level of its severity, which has been worsening year on year. Under the McGowan government, violent crime has increased by 17 per cent over the level that existed when Labor came to office. Meanwhile, family violence is 34 per cent above the five-year average. Over the last decade, four of the Western Australia Police Force's seven regional districts experienced increased severity in crime, with the Pilbara increasing by 31.2 per cent; the goldfields-Esperance region by 35.5 per cent; the midwest-Gascoyne by 45.1 per cent; and the Kimberley by a whopping 96 per cent. A 96 per cent increase in crime is an out-of-control crisis.

This government refused to listen to calls from the opposition about the severity of crime in some regional communities for years. It cannot continue to hide behind empty partisan rhetoric. This worsening situation was put on its radar and it failed to protect the communities and the families at risk. Late last year distressing reports of police being threatened and assaulted in regional areas like the Kimberley made media headlines, raising questions about the efficacy of supports like Operation Regional Shield in supporting those communities. We now see that

Operation Regional Shield will be delivered through royalties for regions. How maintaining key government services like police is a specialised developmental investment, as intended under royalties for regions, is beyond comprehension but the dilution of royalties for regions is in Labor's DNA. This promise that the government made to the people of Western Australia that it will keep them safe has delivered nothing. Despite the recent failures to manage Banksia Hill, culminating in last week's riot, with a \$30 million damage bill, the state's promised Kimberley juvenile justice strategy, which included the on-country facility, is still not complete. Do members know why? I guess because it is out of sight, out of mind. It is not out of sight and out of mind now. Banksia Hill has made it very apparent that it is needed. This budget has proven that this government likes to use the regions for political gain, but when it comes to delivery, it is nowhere to be seen. It is there for the photo op but not for the follow-up or the long haul.

Communities hit by cyclone Seroja were promised a recovery. That has not been delivered. Two years on, the promised workers' accommodation, which would help enable the town's economy to continue to recover, has not been delivered. These communities across the midwest devastated by cyclone Seroja have learnt to live amongst the wreckage and to take charge of their own rebuild. Most of the promised government assistance seems to have evaporated. If you live outside of Perth, this government will fail you.

Labor governments have a track record of attacking regional communities. Just look at the government's successful quick removal of regional voices from the Legislative Council and its proposal to take yet another seat out of the bush in the Legislative Assembly. Look too at its neglectful decisions to shut down the native forestry industry, without warning or consultation, or its silence in standing up to Canberra on the phase-out of live sheep exports, the mess it is making of the end of coal for electricity production in Collie and the hit it has placed on coastal communities with its decisions around fishing restrictions and marine parks. As an example, the Labor government continues to play games with Western Australia's fisheries and marine industries—a staple of our state's vast and diverse coastline. Recfishwest has warned that the recreational fishing community and industry need to be involved in the \$10 million demersal scalefish support package. It believes that the \$110 million charter fishing sector has been neglected in the package. There has been great concern among the 50 or so businesses up and down the coast that will be affected. One of my constituents will see their charter business cut by 80 per cent, and they will not be able to continue.

This government boasts of its support for aquaculture, yet it failed to adequately manage the Geraldton finfish nursery process, wasting taxpayers' money. It lost a local business, which had been involved in the industry for years and had built up immense intellectual knowledge of the industry. It was neglected in favour of an interstate company. That business has now departed. That \$10 million has been wiped from the budget before the ink even dried. That is another empty promise.

The government has continually undermined legitimate industries that underpin jobs and communities. Who will forget the government's attempt to nationalise part of the rock lobster industry—another unifying moment for regional Western Australia, which came together to fight this particular attempt by the McGowan government?

The government's announcement of \$22.2 million for electronic tags for the estimated 14.2 million sheep in Western Australia's flock has been met with mixed support. It begs the question: what flock will remain as the McGowan Labor government stands aside and lets the Albanese Labor government decimate Western Australia's live sheep export industry? Local sheep prices have plummeted in anticipation of Labor's ban. There is effectively no market for many of the sheep involved in the livestock export industry. The Premier claims to support the industry. The Premier claims to have conveyed his support for federal Minister Murray Watt. This is the Premier who claims to have secured the historic GST deal, yet he cannot secure the future of one industry. It is either the case that the Premier does not support live export or he does not care enough to stand up to his colleagues. They spell the end for a thriving, productive \$136 million industry which has helped, in part, to deliver this surplus.

Agriculture is one of Western Australia's key industries. The Nationals and Liberals remain committed to all sectors of the agricultural industry and will work to ensure their future now and into the future, including discussions around the effect of climate change and associated policies. For all regional industries, good transport links are an essential element. This opposition acknowledges the great support of the former coalition government in Canberra in providing funding for important regional projects, such as the wheatbelt secondary freight network and also the agricultural supply chain improvement initiative. The opposition strongly supports such projects continuing and we will continue to liaise with the transport sector and the industries and communities it services as we develop our policies prior to the next election. Road safety is very important to all Western Australians. In this National Road Safety Week, I note that, sadly, last year 175 Western Australians lost their lives on our roads. Two-thirds of those people were lost on regional roads. The opposition will be working with groups like the RAC to help ensure that road safety is prioritised, especially on those risky roads such as the South Coast Highway, which has been the subject of calls from my colleague the member for Roe in recent times. We would also like to see the road trauma trust account money expended in full to further enable safer roads.

The opposition believes that a strong economy is a diverse economy. Surely, then, any fiscally responsible government would want to invest in regional growth. There is significant economic benefit in bolstering the services to regional centres by ensuring the local availability of critical services for businesses, and life more generally, such as health services, education, aged care and child care et cetera. In the last few years, we have seen a tendency of people to settle in regional areas such as Albany, which has seen a significant influx of people from Perth. If we are to maintain this flow of people from Perth, we must maintain and create amenity close to home. As an example, I know that a number of conversations are occurring across regional WA, in the mining sector and in regional communities generally about the need for the provision of child care. Some larger businesses are now trying to provide child care within their own facilities, as there is no alternative. It makes sense for them to do so because increased child care increases and diversifies the pool of applicants for any role and encourages an employee to live close to site, as opposed to being a fly in, fly out worker. That is a better outcome for the business and the employee. The same undeniable benefit that would flow from that would also be brought to a community. We need to take the opportunity in Western Australia to ensure that we are focused on regionalising our services rather than centralising our services. It will be to the detriment of the government and those communities if the government fails to see the abundant opportunity in our regions.

I welcome that the government has given a nod to industry diversification. I have a release here from the government on Thursday last week on budget day for a \$46 million boost to drive economic diversification in Western Australia. I welcome that the government has given a nod to industry diversification. Even though I would say that it is a hodgepodge collection of announcements scattered across a number of portfolios, it is a start. Our state has a vast range of immense opportunities. Many and most of those stem from the wealth in our regions. As a measure of that, I need only look at projects in a radius of about an hour from my office in Dongara. I see the many exciting opportunities that present in that part of the midwest. The opposition has and will be supportive of worthwhile investments and policy settings that will help secure new and diverse opportunities ranging from the downstream processing of critical minerals to the development of new fertiliser options with a lower carbon footprint, hydrogen, and a range of new technologies. There is a plethora of potential for our state, but there is a window of opportunity that we must seize. As always, with that, we need to ensure there is a government that is able to make promises and also deliver them.

Land supply and housing, especially in regional areas, will be a key component to enabling new developments. It is essential that utility providers are able to provide services in a timely way, and they must devote sufficient resources to this task. As an example, the provision of power in regional Western Australia is often problematic. A couple of examples from my own electorate illustrate the unreliability of the power supply and also of the connection time it takes for a business wishing to develop or expand. Power prices are crippling small business but power connection times mean businesses cannot get off the ground. For example, a brewery in Jurien Bay has waited 15 months for power connection and fears losing everything it has worked for. The delay means that it may not meet its liquor licensing requirements and also the local government conditions. Potentially, it could be shut down. An agricultural manufacturing support business in Goomalling has invested \$2 million in a new building. The business has waited 12 months for the power up to now and it will take another three months to actually get a quote. The parent company in Ballarat, which has 500 staff operating around the country, is staggered at the delays and the cost of doing business in Western Australia. It refers to the WA tax. I ask: are we really open for business? The McGowan Labor government gave a nod to diversification in recent announcements and by providing regional land supply and headworks, but it is a drop in the ocean compared with what may be needed, potentially. The opposition's regional headworks investment fund would see \$1 billion spent over 10 years to unlock development and encourage land releases in Western Australia. The high cost of connecting water, power and sewage has put many in local government and the private sector offside when it comes to developing commercial, industrial and residential land. The opposition's policy is real and genuine investment.

The lack of preparedness for natural disasters is an issue that is also plaguing the regions. Calls to release the state risk report have fallen on deaf ears, with no money in the budget for the implementation of the recommendations of that report. The Western Australian environment is prone to natural disasters and will increasingly become so because of the impact of climate change. We need only look at severe tropical cyclone Seroja, the Kimberley floods, the animal biosecurity threats that are just offshore and the 2022 bushfires to see that our capacity can often be stretched. Preparedness for natural disasters is not exclusively a government responsibility, which is why it is incumbent on the Premier to release this report to the public. If the community can be better prepared, it deserves the opportunity to be so. I would hate to see the government hide away information that could protect lives and livelihoods from the impact of natural disasters.

This budget is largely one of smoke and mirrors. It is full of empty promises and re-announcements of announcements. The McGowan Labor government gives with one hand while it takes with the other and thinks that Western Australians are none the wiser, much like it thinks people forget the missed opportunities and the poor decisions it makes. For the last six years of this government, the Western Australian Treasury has been gifted surplus

after surplus, coming on the back of our strong royalties and the GST floor that was raised by the former coalition federal government, with little or no benefit being felt in the community.

This budget is another missed opportunity by the McGowan Labor government to show real support for community service organisations facing unprecedented demand for their essential services. Those services are doing the heavy lifting when it comes to supporting the most vulnerable in our community. I would like to put on record the opposition's support for the great work those groups do. If the government had to pick up the full range of tasks that they and the 600 000 volunteers undertake right across the state, there would be an immense cost, a huge hit on the budget and a huge gap in delivery. Volunteering WA estimates that \$39 billion is contributed to the Western Australian economy every year by those 600 000 volunteers. The opposition has called on the government to provide \$300 million in support over the next two years to enable those Western Australian not-for-profit organisations to cope with the surge in demand from families doing it tough, but the government has failed to do so. A government led by the Nationals–Liberal opposition would not make promises that it could not keep. We believe that a government should be held accountable for its commitments. We believe that a government that is committed should deliver on its time lines, with measurable milestones established. Making a promise with no plan to deliver is a waste of my time and a waste of yours. What people will see from us leading into 2025 is honesty about time lines.

The Premier waxes lyrical about the benefits of his surplus, but it is not his; it is Western Australia's. What does Western Australia's \$4.2 billion surplus look like? For those in the midwest, it means no reliable power. For those in the Kimberley, it means very few doctors. For those in the south west, it means a chronic housing shortage. For those in the wheatbelt, well, we know the road fatality statistics there. For families, it means astronomical waitlists for child health services. For youth, it means difficulty in attending a school that has adequate teaching staff. For the elderly, it means unsustainable housing, inaccessible health care and no capacity to age in the community that they helped to build. The Premier's surplus may play well for a front page headline or at the national cabinet table, but in a state as rich as ours, Western Australians seem to have been forgotten.

If we look beyond the steps of Parliament, what does the surplus mean? The government continues to announce and re-announce projects that it will not deliver. It continues to make promises that it cannot and will not keep. The opposition in government would deliver. As I said earlier, the job of the opposition is to hold the government to account. We believe that this budget is full of smoke and mirrors. It is a budget that promises to fail. It is a budget that will not deliver for Western Australia. There are 116 000 children in food-insecure homes; 34 000 people on housing waiting lists; countless regional families wondering whether their industry has a future; nurses who are covering triple shifts; small business owners who are working through the night, with no solution to the worker shortage in sight; and community services stretched to their limit in every corner of the state. If we take a snapshot of our state, it does not appear to be one that has endured the benefits of six years of surplus. It has had six years of Labor.

MR S.J. PRICE (Forresterfield — Deputy Speaker) [1.21 pm]: It gives me great pleasure to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation (Recurrent 2023–24) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (Capital 2023–24) Bill 2023. Before I get into it, I note, once again, that the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech was a policy void. Love him or hate him, at least the federal opposition leader got up and gave some policy alternatives in his budget reply speech. It is our choice whether we like what he said, but at least he gave it a go. All we just had from the Leader of the Opposition was 45 minutes of throwing stones, with no suggestion of how the opposition would help. I actually liked one comment of the Leader of the Opposition, when he referred to the Nationals–Liberal government into the future. I am not sure who will be the alternative Premier candidate at the next election, but it obviously sounds like he plans to keep the title of Leader of the Opposition and potentially become a future Premier of the state. Next time, he should throw some thoughts out there. Once again, it was a policy-free zone. The opposition should come up with some ideas. We are 18, 19 or 20 months out from an election and there is still nothing from the other side about how it would do anything differently from the way things are being done, and what benefits that would provide to Western Australians.

I am very excited and happy about this budget. The fact that we have a surplus is a good thing. When we came to government after eight years of the previous Liberal–National government, state debt was travelling towards \$40 billion. Treasurer Ben Wyatt did the work on that at the time. From memory, there had been an average increase of about 8.6 per cent year after year in recurrent expenditure when members opposite were in government; hence, we ran such bad deficits. I will talk about why things are so good a little bit later, but I will first touch on some of the highlights. A \$4.2 billion surplus is a good thing. There has been a massive investment in health and mental health. As I said, there will be a record \$2.7 billion of new investment in health. Health is now over a third of the state budget. This is the most that has ever been invested in health. The economy is doing well. The unemployment rate is 3.4 per cent. That is pretty much full employment. It has never been at that level before and I doubt that it will get much lower, because the number of people who want to work are working. We have created nearly 220 000 jobs in the six years we have been in government, with 120 000 in the last two years. This is good news; this is a really good outcome for Western Australia.

The Leader of the Opposition said the government had not paid down debt. We actually have paid down debt. The Premier referred to a little graph; the trajectory of debt is now \$16.5 billion lower than was forecast. That is a good thing. That, in itself, will have saved about \$4.3 billion in wasteful interest repayments. We have also got back our AAA credit rating that, once again, had been lost by the former Liberal–National government.

Let us not forget about the cost-of-living support that is out there. Once again, we are providing a \$400 electricity credit for people. We had \$600 and \$400 credits, and now we are providing another \$400 credit. That means a lot to people. For some people, that is their power bill paid for the year. Members opposite can sit there and say that it should be more, but it is a responsible way of giving help to those who need it. On top of that, additional money is available for those who need it. In total, there is \$826 available for around 350 000 households that are eligible for the energy assistance payment. That is real support for people. In addition, the hardship utility grant scheme has been increased by 10 per cent for those who are in financial hardship. Grants of up to \$640 per household and up to \$1 060 for households in the north are available. That is real support for people. That is money that they need. Of course, small businesses that have a cap of 50 megawatt hours are able to get a credit of \$650 on their power bills as well. To say that the government is not doing anything with the money and the budget, and that it is not helping Western Australians, is incorrect.

Another area that the government is delivering on and investing in is in taking action on climate change. That is a real issue now. We are putting money in places to make a real difference in helping to address climate change into the future. The budget contains \$3 billion to take action on climate change. That is the biggest-ever investment in climate change action. There is \$2.3 billion for Synergy to deliver a 500 megawatt battery in Collie and a second 200 megawatt battery in Kwinana. There is \$368 million for Synergy to build a new wind farm at King Rocks and expand the Warradarge wind farm near Eneabba. These are real things. One of the most pleasing aspects is the \$126 million early planning investment for network upgrades, because we have to make sure that the distribution and transmission systems are suitable to take this form of electricity once we start moving to it. That is another great outcome.

Then we get to Metronet. We are touching pretty much every point of the city with the improvements to the public transport network. The work that we are doing will be life-changing.

I would like to touch on a couple of local issues that are contained in the budget. One is the recent announcement by the Minister for Water of infill sewerage for the Kenwick and Maddington areas of my electorate. That was part of the \$55 million water investment that we announced two weeks ago and includes other Metronet stations. I want to talk particularly about Kenwick. Roughly 120 properties within walking distance of the Kenwick train station are not sewered. The last work under the infill sewerage program in that area was done in 1996 and this section was left out. Since then, the local residents have been fighting to get infill sewerage. This part of Kenwick is undeveloped. There are large blocks, predominantly around an acre in size, going up to a hectare. It is a pretty low lying area that is quite clayey and sits right on the edge of the Brixton Street Wetlands, which is one of the most unique wetlands in the world because of its inverted mudflats. Having septic systems in such close proximity to such a very sensitive environmental asset has always been of concern, let alone having to manage the septic systems during winter in areas that are heavy in clay. When I ran for election back in 2017 that was a live issue. It was an issue at the 2013 election I think and the previous member for Forrestfield, Nathan Morton, had committed to get a study undertaken about what the system would like, how it would be built and what it might cost. The Water Corporation did that work. In 2017 it was still an issue. Unfortunately, I could not get a commitment to get that work done. It has since been an ongoing conversation and the community has been very active. I would certainly like to acknowledge Simone Perkins for her continued advocacy on behalf of the residents in the area in achieving this outcome. Another local resident who has been very vocal on this issue is Bali Singh, as has the Mayor of the City of Gosnells, Teresa Lynes. The mayor and the city have been good to work with in trying to get an outcome over the last six years. We have looked at various ways to resolve this issue. It was great news when we found that it would be part of this \$55 million water investment package that has just been announced. Like with everything else, what makes it a more impressive and an even better outcome is to see it in the budget with line items and money attributed to it. That is a really good outcome.

As we go through some of the outstanding programs that need to happen within the electorate, some things will be of concern to people. The next project that is about to commence in my electorate later this year or early next year will be some intersection upgrades, that being the Hale Road–Tonkin Highway intersection at Forrestfield and Wattle Grove, and the Welshpool Road East–Tonkin Highway intersection at Wattle Grove as well. These are two of the most congested intersections within WA. The amount of traffic that uses Tonkin Highway is incredible. It is a very popular piece of infrastructure and the number of eastern suburbs people who use it to get to and from work is quite incredible.

The intersection of Hale Road and Tonkin Highway at Forrestfield is a bit touchy. Historically, it was never planned for people to access Tonkin Highway from Forrestfield or Wattle Grove. The original design was for a straight flyover, so only a small road reserve was purchased and the size of the intersection has been quite restricted. But

after some consultation and discussion with Main Roads Western Australia and the local community, we were able to improve the outcome and the intersection will now include north-facing ramps. People coming from Forrestfield and Wattle Grove will be able to turn west and head towards Perth or the airport, and if they are heading east, they will be able to turn into Wattle Grove or Forrestfield. The issue is that there are no south-facing ramps. If a person wants to go to Armadale or head south, they will have to use an alternative route, which people are not that happy about. But at the end of the day, the modelling showed that around 20 per cent of the traffic at that intersection headed south, and there will be alternative routes for them. It is just a matter of people getting used to accessing these things a different way. Another concern is about access the intersection, which will be back onto Welshpool Road. That intersection is a bit tricky as well, but the flow of traffic will help that. The next intersection along is the Tonkin Highway–Welshpool Road East intersection, which will be a diamond intersection and that will be great. The third one that is a bit further down the track is the Kelvin Road–Hale Road intersection. All those intersections are contained in the budget and will happen over the next couple of years, which is fabulous.

The new police station in Forrestfield also gets a mention in the budget, which is great. I have been working with the City of Kalamunda to get that up and moving. The government has purchased the old library, which is currently being demolished and sits right next to the current Forrestfield Police Station. Forrestfield police will be able to operate out of the current police station while the new police station is being built next door. The new station is the same as the one that will be built in Baldivis. It will have capacity for around 100 officers and is a vast improvement on the current one, which was built to house about 10 officers but has 30 or so officers operating out of it at present. The additional police resourcing for the area will be a massive improvement for both the foothills, the Forrestfield policing subdistrict and into Kalamunda and the hills as well. The funding for all that is in the budget as well, which is really good.

One of the main issues in my electorate, which the Premier mentioned in his budget speech, is the High Wycombe community hub at the new High Wycombe train station as part of the Forrestfield–Airport Link. The federal government’s \$30 million commitment has been matched by a \$30 million commitment from the state government to build an aquatic and recreation facility and community hub centre at the new train station. That is a very exciting piece of infrastructure that will be built and the support for that is also contained in the budget, which is really good. That development will activate the area around the train station. Once again, the train station is situated in an unusual location because it pretty much backs onto another rail siding, which restricts the catchment area to begin with, and then it has semirural land out the front. The area actually needs to be activated and developed to get the train patronage. The station is quite well used at the moment, but future usage will be significantly higher once that development is finished. The government has to take the lead to ensure that development happens. It will occur on the back of some of the positive announcements for other areas about headworks and providing infill sewerage and those sorts of things.

That has led to the discussion on how that approach needs to be taken in that area as well. Ongoing considerations and conversations are happening around how we can activate that area as quickly as we can. I appreciate that a lot of landowners are essentially trapped in there at the moment and need the development to help them to move on as well, and I will continue to work with them on that.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr S.J. PRICE: One of the other areas of interest to me and quite a few of my constituents is animal welfare. I will have to talk about greyhounds as well shortly. It is great to see an increase in the animal welfare grant program in the budget. I think an extra \$600 000 has been provided, which takes its funding up to \$1.1 million which is really good. When we talk about animal welfare, we need to look at how we can best influence and help the outcomes of a lot of the animals who end up in the rescue and rehoming organisations within the City of Perth. In particular, as most people know, I am a little bit passionate about greyhounds and have two beautiful rescue greyhounds at home. The impact of greyhound racing on the rehoming of dogs in Perth is something that is not really recognised or appreciated. I wanted to put a little bit more pressure on greyhound racing and discuss another consideration why we do not really need to have greyhound racing in Western Australia.

According to the *Racing and Wagering Western Australia 2022 annual report*, exactly 723 greyhounds retired in that year. On average, every year there are around 700 greyhounds that Racing and Wagering Western Australia say are retired and we say are rescued from racing. Those 700 greyhounds then have to go out into the public to be rehomed. Racing and Wagering Western Australia has a rehoming group called Greyhounds as Pets, and it will get a new RWWA-owned facility with capacity for up to 100 dogs. It rehomes roughly half of the dogs, around 350 a year, and the other 350 are rehomed by volunteer organisations like Greyhound Adoptions WA, from which I got my two beautiful puppies.

Around 700 greyhounds are being rehomed each year, but that puts pressure on other animal welfare rehoming agencies because only so many people out there will adopt a dog. Especially in these challenging times, with limited rental properties and people not being able to afford cost-of-living pressures, one of the first things that

people have to give up is, unfortunately, their pet, whether that be a cat, a dog or whatever. I am talking about just dogs at the moment.

The racing industry, in my words, uses and abuses these animals. It makes money out of them, and when they are no longer profitable, it palms them off to the public to look after. As a result of those roughly 700 dogs having to be found a home, 700 fewer other dogs can find a home. Those other dogs are out there because of other reasons, not because of someone trying to exploit them and make money from them. That then flows on to capacity.

Someone cannot own a greyhound without breeding it for racing. The only way someone can get a greyhound is after the trainer is finished with it and does not want it anymore; it then goes out to the public to be owned. Because they have never been exposed to or brought up in a normal household, they do not know anything about living in a house. They do not know how to walk on tiles or walk up stairs, and they do not understand many commands, such as recall or anything like that. They have to be trained to live with people, and foster parents are used to do that. Every dog that gets rehomed has to be fostered first so someone can train them in how to be a domestic animal. Of the 700 greyhounds being rehomed, Greyhounds as Pets does that training as part of its process for the ones that come to it. The other 350 that go to the general public go to foster homes first to get trained and then, hopefully, get rehomed. The problem we get into is that GAP is full; it needs foster people to look after its dogs as well. The industry-owned rehoming service cannot cope with the volume of animals it receives so it restricts the number of dogs it takes. The dogs it cannot take then have to stay with the trainers, where they stay in the kennels and they are not looked after because they are not racing and not making money, so it is a downhill spiral for those dogs. It is pressure on animals that we do not need, especially pressure on the dogs that are looking for a home and have a legitimate reason for ending up in a rehoming agency—not because of the racing industry trying to make money for people.

In around 2013, I think, Racing and Wagering Western Australia started rehoming greyhounds. GAP started doing the green collar training in 2013, and Greyhound Adoptions WA started in around 2010, I think. Since then I have seen some figures. The figures I have seen are not completely up to date, but it has rehomed 2 700 dogs in that time. That is, once again, 2 700 dogs from the racing industry that, if we did not have that racing industry and they were bred as pets, would not put pressure on the adoption market for pets. That 2 700 is only half because the other half has gone through GAP. Over 5 000 greyhounds are out and about, and we see them now when we never would have seen them before because a lot of them used to be used for medical training, and a lot of them just were euthanised. Occasionally, they were kept for breeding or pets, but the majority of them ended up dead. Because over 5 000 are out there, we get to see a lot of them, and they are beautiful dogs.

The problem is that other animal shelters—such as Swan Animal Haven in my electorate—see greyhounds taking all the spaces. It is becoming a challenge to the relationships between different agencies. If we did not breed these dogs for racing, they would just be another purebred dog, like an Old English sheepdog. I used to have them as well. They would just become another purebred dog, and they would be managed and bred the same way that other purebred dogs are bred as pets. As a consequence of them becoming a by-product of gambling, the general public has to deal with it.

I shall continue to give updates on greyhound racing and the multiple reasons we do not need it. Hopefully, one day we will just talk about how we will phase it out, because we will need to have a plan for that. Around 1 700 dogs are going through the system. Around 1 600 or 1 700 dogs are raced each year, so a couple of hundred dogs are coming through to replace the dogs that are going out the other end. A lot of planning would have to go into managing what would happen to those animals. It is something that we will continue to talk about and make people aware of. The minister is here, which is great; he always listens to the conversations I have. Animal welfare is one of the many parts of the Labor Party's social program, and it is an important part.

Going right back to the beginning, it is great budget. Running a surplus is a good thing. The opposition has no policies, and it gives me pleasure to commend the bills to the house.

MS M.J. HAMMAT (Mirrabooka — Parliamentary Secretary) [1.48 pm]: It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak on the two bills we are dealing with today, the Appropriation (Recurrent 2023–24) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (Capital 2023–24) Bill 2023 or, as we colloquially refer to them, the state budget, which was handed down by the Premier; Treasurer last Thursday. As others have done before me, I wanted to start my comments by congratulating the Premier; Treasurer for his leadership, particularly in relation to our state finances. I also wanted to acknowledge all the cabinet ministers who have been part of working towards achieving a really outstanding budget that continues the good work of the McGowan Labor government.

At the heart of this budget and, indeed, the others that this government has handed down is a commitment to do a number of things simultaneously. The first is to restore sound financial management after the lack of discipline that we saw under the Liberal–National government. We have seen a strong set of assumptions underpinning income revenue projections and a very disciplined approach to expenditure as well. Over the period of this government, this has ensured that we achieved a substantial recovery in the state's finances. That is important because it has

allowed us to share the benefits with those in the community who need it most. I will talk a bit about that as I go through my comments. However, this is to not just share the benefits with those most in need at present, but also ensure that we are investing in the future of the state. We are using the benefits of good financial management to diversify the economy, grow the economy and provide good financial circumstances, not just today, but also into the future for those generations of Western Australians who will come after us. It is because of these principles at the heart of this budget that I think we can see what is truly a Labor budget. That commitment to achieving sound financial management to protect the most vulnerable and to grow the economy and the state into the future is at the heart of what Labor governments are about. We can see those values in this budget, as indeed we have seen them in previous budgets.

I will not spend much time on it today, but others before me have talked about the context in which that good financial management has been achieved. It is easy to forget, but to achieve that good financial outcome in the face of a global pandemic that upended all our known certainties is a remarkable achievement indeed. As we look into the future, we see that we need to ensure that we have very sensible and sustainable financial management because the global forecast remains unsettled.

In my comments today, I want to talk about how this budget will make a difference to the people I represent in my electorate of Mirrabooka. I want to start by talking about the \$400 energy credit. I am very pleased that this budget is delivering cost-of-living relief for everyday people in WA—a total of \$715 million. By delivering another \$400 energy credit to every household in Western Australia, the McGowan Labor government is helping people with the cost-of-living pressures. The \$400 payment will benefit everyone. It will be delivered when people need it and it will apply without people having to qualify or apply for it. I am also very pleased that there will be targeted electricity support totalling \$826 for those households most in need. This initiative follows the success of the \$600 energy credit that took effect in November 2020 and the \$400 credit that was announced in last year's budget. Since 2020, the McGowan Labor government has delivered a total of \$1 400 of electricity credits to households. It will provide much-needed relief to families and households. I want to take this opportunity to pass on the thanks of my constituents in Mirrabooka to the Premier; Treasurer. This announcement has been very well received in my electorate. People have already contacted me to find out when the money will be paid.

Before I talk more about the \$400 energy credit, I would like to acknowledge the students from John Septimus Roe Anglican Community School, one of the schools in my electorate of Mirrabooka, who have joined us in the gallery.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms M.M. Quirk): Welcome. It used to be in my electorate many moons ago.

Ms M.J. HAMMAT: We have a number of groups from that school attending Parliament today and tomorrow, and I am very excited to see them here. Welcome.

As I was saying, the \$400 energy credit has been very well received in my electorate of Mirrabooka, as indeed were the previous credits. I want to take this opportunity to share the story of one of my constituents, Mrs Tran. I want to talk about her, because I think it demonstrates how important this assistance is. As we know, the \$400 credit last year was applied to every power account. When I am doorknocking in the community, people tell me how well received it was. The thing about this case is because of her particular circumstances, we were there when she received her \$400, and her joy was overwhelming. What happened was the electricity account had been in her husband's name, and when he passed away, she did not receive what was left of that credit on her bill. She did not speak English and she did not understand she was entitled to it. That was the case until I put out a newsletter, translated into Vietnamese for about 1 500 people in my electorate, which talked about the electricity credit and how it was available. She received the newsletter, realised the money had not been credited to her account after her husband passed away, and contacted my office. With the support of interpreters, we were able to assist her and follow up with Synergy. We were there when she was told that the amount had been credited to her account. She was overjoyed by that news. There were hugs and tears of joy. It was such a happy day when we were able to provide her with that assistance. I think that is an important reminder about how the \$400 credit on people's energy accounts can make such a profound difference to their ability to meet increases in the cost of living. When I doorknock in my electorate, many people raise with me how the \$400 they received in the last budget made a real difference to them.

In this budget, we will also increase the hardship utility grant scheme, again helping those who are most in need. The other thing that stands out in the cost-of-living measures is free public transport on the first Sunday of each month. This will add to the success of the two-zone capped fares already introduced by this government. These incredible benefits will ensure that our public transport system is utilised and keeps the cost of living down. The seniors cost-of-living rebate will be increased in line with inflation. All these initiatives are providing relief to people in the community who need it most, at a time when cost-of-living pressures are real for many people.

The other significant issue for many of the people I represent is access to an affordable place to live. I am very excited to see the continuing commitment to housing in this budget. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the good work that the Minister for Housing has been doing to ensure that we have a supply of housing that is affordable and available for Western Australians. The \$511 million boost for social housing and homelessness

is a significant investment that will make a real difference to many people, including the people I represent in Mirrabooka. It is a total investment of \$2.6 billion over the next four years—record levels of investment by the McGowan Labor government. The total number of social houses to be added is 4 000, with 1 200 already delivered. This investment in delivering more social housing is fundamentally important to providing help to many vulnerable people in our community.

I also want to acknowledge the decision to fund the establishment of the Office of Homelessness to improve coordination across government and improve outcomes generally. I think this is a very good initiative that highlights how seriously this government is taking the need to ensure that we are addressing housing and homelessness issues. I am also very pleased that the budget includes initiatives to assist in ensuring that we have the residential construction workforce we need to get houses built as soon as possible. These are not just good initiatives to ensure that houses get built, but also great initiatives for investing in our construction workforce, helping young people and others to get and keep jobs.

The total of \$48 million in training initiatives that has been announced in this budget to expand the residential construction workforce is also very important. It includes payments of \$2 000 for apprentices who complete their training and a \$500 rebate for safety tools.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 2414.]