

COST OF LIVING — FEES AND CHARGES

298. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Treasurer:

I refer to the strong, responsible financial management of the McGowan Labor government and its efforts to protect the WA economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how the state budget is continuing to provide unprecedented support for households facing cost-of-living pressures?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house how this support compares with the way households were treated by the Liberal–National government, including the Leader of the Opposition as the then Minister for Water?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Murray–Wellington for the question.

- (1)–(2) The truth is that this government has done more to support Western Australians with cost-of-living pressures than any government in memory. I just want to remind members of our record prior to this budget. We froze fees and charges in 2020–21, which was at the height of the COVID pandemic. We delivered the \$600 household credit using the Bell proceeds in 2020, again not adding to debt to do it; we capped public transport fares at two zones, so someone in Dawesville, where I was the other day, will save potentially \$3 000 a year; and we put the cap on regional airfares, which has never been done before by a government in Australia, and the Nationals and Liberals never even considered it. We put the cap on regional airfares to help regional residents. We delivered free rapid antigen tests across the community and there are new arrangements so that people can get free RATs if they are close contacts. We are the only government in Australia providing free RATs to every household that applies, or even goes and collects them. We doubled the energy assistance payments. Just so members know, in terms of Mr Glasson’s comments, if someone is on a commonwealth Health Care Card, they not only get the \$400, but also the energy assistance payment, which is \$318 as well. So, \$718 will click on to their account as a credit as of 1 July. People on a commonwealth Health Care Card, 300 000 households across the state, will receive that. I am not aware of another government that is as supportive as that. We restored funding for financial counsellors, helping people get themselves out of their predicaments, that the last government cut. We expanded the hardship utility grant scheme and a whole range of others out there.

But we know that there is financial pressure at the moment because of issues outside our control, particularly the cost-of-living increases. That is why we put in place the \$400 household electricity credit, which the Liberals and Nationals oppose. They opposed the \$600 in 2020, they opposed —

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Hold on, you did! There we go, we have one come in.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr M. McGOWAN: As Paul Keating said, “This is a salmon that actually jumps on the hook for you”!

The Leader of the Liberal Party went out on 16 May and said that giving cost relief to families was all just politics. He said that it is all about the federal election. Our budget was set months ago. We did not know when the federal election was going to be held and we do our budget preparation carefully in the lead-up to that. We will provide relief to families, as we have across our term in government. That is \$445 million straight back to Western Australians. As I said to members before, this will give some relief to people who never get anything from government—working and middle-class families who need support.

It is within the capability of the state to do this because we actually run the electricity system. Unlike New South Wales, we did not sell it all off while at the same time blowing debt and blowing deficits. They are amazing economic managers! We actually ensured that we kept it in public ownership, and we are delivering this to families across the state—something that never occurred under the last Liberal–National government. This is the third consecutive year that household fees have been kept below CPI. The former government never did that in office. In fact, the average increase was about 10 per cent for electricity and water during its term in office. This year, when we take into account the totality of everything we have done, fees and charges are going down by 3.8 per cent across the board for families in Western Australia. That is very different from what occurred under the last government.

The Leader of the Liberal Party described the \$600 credit in 2020 as a disgraceful waste. He said that giving families some money during a very frightening time was a disgraceful waste. He opposed our free RAT program. We were the only government in Australia that provided RATs to people around the state. The only one in the opposition who seems to be in favour of what we are doing is Hon Dr Steve Thomas, who always comes through with the goods. He always comes through. He has this honesty gene going on in his head. He cannot help but endorse everything

we do, which I appreciate, but he is the only one. The rest of you are so miserable and so looking to be negative that even when we deliver surpluses, debt reduction, record investment in health, record investment in diversification of the state economy, significant down payments for Indigenous housing and climate change, and reduce the cost of living, you criticise and find things to be negative about because that is your nature.