

NET DEBT — 2023–24 STATE BUDGET

300. Ms L. METTAM to the Treasurer:

I have a supplementary question. There have been record windfalls to the state with surpluses projected. Does the Treasurer accept that his claim of paying down debt is deliberately misleading the WA public when the government's own figures show that this is not the case, with record windfalls to come?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I have some advice on two fronts. Firstly, you continued with a statement rather than a question. Secondly, you will need to withdraw the element when you used the word “deliberately”. You said “deliberately misleading”. That is unparliamentary. If you would like to make that kind of accusation, you would need to do that by way of a substantive motion. Perhaps we can just have a short sharp question from you.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the Treasurer accept that his claim of paying down debt is misleading the WA public given his own figures illustrates that is not the case?

The SPEAKER: That is the question. Thank you.

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

Obviously, the answer is no. Over the last financial year, debt will go down \$1.7 billion. By 30 June, it will go down to \$27.9 billion. Does the Leader of the Liberal Party understand the financial year? It concludes on 30 June. That is a drop of \$1.7 billion in debt. It is the fourth year in a row that debt has gone down. As I said to the member, no other government in Australia is doing that, yet she comes in here and complains about it. Every other state in Australia looks at Western Australia and is envious of what is occurring here.

Ms L. Mettam: You have had the windfalls.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I have two points to make about that. Firstly, as I said to the member, the mining boom from 2007–08 through to 2014 was monumental—bigger than the existing successor resources industry, yet the former government managed to blow debt because it did not manage its finances. It actually requires you to show some strength in government, which you did not show; we have. Secondly, we have surpluses across the forward estimates. I explained to the member how the forward estimates work. I expect that debt will come down next year because we budget cautiously. It has gone down each year even though the forward estimates had it going up, because we estimate our revenues very cautiously. That just means that it is all upside risk for the state. That is a good thing for the state, just so the member opposite knows.

Anyway, the record is there. The Liberals and Nationals cannot manage money. What did the last federal government blow debt to? It was \$1 trillion. In all its discussion, the opposition is ignoring the fact that over the COVID period we spent around \$12 billion in COVID response. We had to invest that in terms of COVID response in order to manage the situation we faced. Despite that, we are in the position we are, which is the strongest financial and economic position of anywhere in Australia and probably the world.