

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) RECURRENT 2012–13 BILL 2012
APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNT) CAPITAL 2012–13 BILL 2012

Cognate Debate — Motion

On motion by **Hon Simon O'Brien (Minister for Finance)**, resolved —

That orders of the day 38 and 39 be debated cognately.

Second Reading — Cognate Debate

Resumed from 14 June.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [4.08 pm]: I rise in support of these bills but I begin by noting that I am not the lead speaker for the opposition on these bills. I am making the speech on these bills that I would have otherwise made in respect to the noting of the budget papers.

It is important to note that the appropriations in this budget have not properly addressed the very real cost-of-living pressures that far too many Western Australian families are experiencing. One of the themes of the government and I guess one of the headings that is appearing on each of its media releases around the budget statements is around supporting our community. However, I think the reality is that this budget is slugging the community with higher and higher household costs, when the economic indicators are telling us that there should be a much better distribution of the benefits of the resources boom than Western Australian families are experiencing. We have economic growth of 4.75 per cent in an economy that is currently outperforming the rest of the nation. In the words of a former Prime Minister, Western Australian families should in fact be feeling relaxed and comfortable right now, but many of them are not, and they are blaming Mr Barnett's cost-of-living increases for that. Out of this budget, the average WA family will be paying an extra \$163 on those household costs. Over the life of this government, household costs have gone up by an extra \$1 100 a year. That is made up of a 62 per cent increase in electricity prices, a 40 per cent increase in water prices and a 57 per cent increase in gas prices, and there are more price increases to come. Indeed, built into the assumptions of the budget, in the forward estimates of the budget are further increases, for example, in electricity prices of 25 per cent—a five per cent increase, a 10 per cent increase and then a further 10 per cent increase. The increases to date have caused enormous pain because they have been introduced too fast and have been too high. The 62 per cent increase in electricity bills since 2008 is the compounded effect of all the increases, including the 3.5 per cent increase in the budget that is before us now. Under a re-elected Barnett government, if it were to be successful in March next year, charges will go up by a further 25 per cent—five per cent in 2013–14, 10 per cent in 2014–15, and 10 per cent in 2015–16.

Much was made in the budget of the new form of assistance that the government has announced for families on low incomes. That is the payment referred to as the cost-of-living assistance—or COLA—payment. It is important to unpack that compensation to figure out exactly how much of that compensation is new money —

Hon Helen Morton: I haven't heard the "unpack" word for a while, so that was just —

Hon SUE ELLERY: The minister likes it or she does not like it?

Hon Helen Morton: I do like it.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Okay; I will use it more often then.

Hon Simon O'Brien: Let's drill down a bit.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Brian Ellis): Perhaps the member can just stick to the speech.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Which included the word "unpack".

So let us unpack it a bit. It was already the case —

Hon Simon O'Brien interjected.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Yes, we will be packing up in about three minutes.

It was already the case that low-income families have long received assistance with their energy bills. The COLA payment of \$200 replaces the existing supply charge rebate of \$147, so what is the increase for those families? It is \$53. For an average family with two children who also receive the dependent child rebate, the increase is \$63. That is an additional \$10 on top of the supply charge rebate. That is in the face of an increase in household costs of \$163. Of course, to fund that increase of \$53 or \$63, the government did not add new money; the government took the money that it was already spending on the hardship efficiency program that assisted those same low-income families by providing them with home energy audits and advice so that they could find ways to save money so they would be spending less money on energy and be billed less money.

The payments that are touted by this government as being new ways of assisting WA families are not to a new group of WA families; they are to the same group that has always received assistance. Any extra assistance is to be welcomed, and I am sure that these families welcome it. But let us not kid ourselves that it is assisting more families and let us not kid ourselves that we are substantially increasing the assistance to the families who have always received it. It is \$53 a year, or \$63 a year if the people have dependent children. That is not per bill, it is not per quarter, but per year. Without two children, that is a bit over \$1 a week. That is not the infamous Amanda Vanstone's pie and choc milk; it is neither of those two things. It is about a \$1 Macca's soft-serve ice-cream. That is the value of what we are giving people to assist them to pay their bills. We are giving them an extra \$53 or, if they have children, an extra \$63 a year. If the average bill is around \$1 700, that extra \$53 or \$63 will be welcomed.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm