

CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

154. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Premier:

Before I ask my question, I take a moment to wish everybody a very happy St Patrick's Day.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI: I refer to the state government's response to the impact of COVID-19 on the Western Australian economy. Can the Premier outline to the house what this government is doing to provide relief to Western Australian households during this uncertain time and, in particular, support to vulnerable Western Australians such as pensioners and carers?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

Our state is confronting an economic challenge that we have never seen before. Although our first priority is of course the health and wellbeing of Western Australians and slowing the spread of COVID-19, we also recognise that the impact to our economy is going to be immense. This will be an uncertain time for businesses and an anxious time for workers. It will put pressure on households. That is why the immediate support package that we announced yesterday aims to provide those businesses and households with some support and assistance. It is a first step. There will be more to come. What we announced yesterday builds on the stimulus measures that we announced in recent months. I remind the Parliament of those measures: a school and hospital maintenance program of \$300 million; cuts to TAFE fees of over \$54 million; a social and affordable housing package of over \$220 million; and rebates on stamp duty for multistorey investments. All that comes in at a cost of \$760 million worth of stimulus measures that we have put in place in the last few months.

Along with that, and all that was in mind yesterday, the government announced a further response. It comes at a further cost of \$607 million. It is the biggest support package of its kind in Western Australia in living memory. Providing relief to households and businesses, it is at the heart of this immediate response. We are spending more than \$400 million to keep fees and charges at their current levels for the next financial year. That means that there will be no increase in household fees and charges from now until at least 1 July 2021. It will cover all fees and charges, including electricity, water, motor vehicle charges, the emergency services levy and public transport fares. It will be the first time in 15 years that this has been done in Western Australia, and it can only happen because of this government's discipline and responsible financial management. We are also doubling the energy assistance payment to \$600 for eligible concession cardholders. This will provide relief to around 300 000 Western Australian households. What is important about this measure is that the increase to the payment will be front loaded. That means that those households will have an additional \$300 credit on their power bills. For many, that will mean they will not have to pay anything on their power bill for the remainder of the financial year. Some will have credit to carry over to their next set of bills. For others, their bills will be very, very small. This is particularly targeted to vulnerable Western Australians, including the elderly, and it gives our local businesses more spending capacity.

There is more to do. Work continues on developing further policies and initiatives to roll out in the short term to support the economy and support the community. We did the hard work to put our budget in a strong financial position. This allows us to respond as we have and as we will continue to do. I call on every part of the Western Australian community to help us—banks, local governments and major landlords. We are in this together. Banks, landlords and local governments need to be kind to their customers and ratepayers. What is the point of bankrupting a small businessperson in this environment? There is no point; it will just make it worse. There is no doubt that the coming weeks and months will be very difficult, but we will get through this and, until we do, we need all hands on deck.