

STATE BUDGET 2011–12 — IMPACT ON FAMILIES

*Motion*

**HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan)** [10.11 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett–Grylls government for its dishonest budget, which is harsh on families and drunk on debt.

I welcome the opportunity to make some comments on the impact of the 2011–12 budget, in particular its impact on families. The first thing I want to put on the public record is that this is indeed a bad budget and is built on very poor assumptions. It is inherently dishonest in terms of the way in which it is being sold throughout the state. There is no doubt in my mind that this budget will have a substantial adverse impact on the average Western Australian family. It is also likely to have an adverse impact on businesses, be they small, medium or large businesses, in particular as a result of the utility hikes that this budget brings forward. When we look at this budget, we can see that there is no real growth across health, education, and law and order. Any additional allocation of money seems to be made simply because of the demand created from an increase in population and from consumer price index pressures in those areas.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney** interjected.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I do not know whether this budget is considered to be a great budget by government members. However, I do know that Hon Wendy Duncan, in giving her budget speech in Kalgoorlie–Boulder on the day the budget was brought down, vowed to keep the state government honest over the increase in utility prices. That is what she sees as her role. When I read that, I found that incredible.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney** interjected.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Hon Wendy Duncan is a parliamentary secretary; her leader sits in the cabinet and she is playing a duplicitous role and pretending that she is separate from the government. I find that incredible. I find it lacks integrity. I just say that one would only go to Kalgoorlie–Boulder and present oneself in that way if one were ashamed of the impact of this budget. Clearly Hon Wendy Duncan is, but I will leave that issue for later.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! We can do without the four or five little audible conversations happening. The member on her feet is trying to direct her comments through the Chair. I can see that this morning! I give the call to Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Thanks, Mr President. This budget does not support the community. Being badged as a people-friendly budget would have to be the biggest joke out. This government is, in fact, creating an underclass within this society.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! Other members will want to contribute to this debate without interjections. So, as I keep saying, the same rules apply to everybody. Please allow the member on her feet to continue her remarks without interjections.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Mr President, I am happy for any member to get on their feet on this motion and to present what they want to present to this place on the benefits of this budget, as they see it. I am putting on the public record only my interpretation of this budget, which has been sold as a people's budget. Yet when I go through the detail of this budget, all I see is revenue raising. All I see is no commitment to honouring election promises. All I see is the creation of a group of people who, because of the hardships imposed on them by this government, particularly through increases in utility charges, will invariably find themselves unable to pay those utility charges.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, minister!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** They will invariably find themselves with either debt collectors at their door or presenting to a non-government organisation such as the Salvos, or whoever, looking for assistance. The Minister for Community Services says, "But then we've put money into homes and we've put money into supporting NGOs." Yes, she has, but the government created the problem first, and she is trying to address it at the end point. The government should never have created the problem. That is really the point.

Several members interjected.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** This budget does not deliver on major social infrastructure projects. The government has crowed about many projects, such as the major stadium, for a considerable length of time. However, when we look at what is in the budget, there is nothing there. The Ellenbrook rail is yet another example of that, but there are pages and pages of examples of election commitments this government has crowed about and has failed to honour.

An important part of this budget appears to be that the government is taking as much revenue as it can out of the utilities and putting it in the consolidated fund, while at the same time running the argument publicly that it is increasing utility charges because we must move to full cost reflectivity. There is no doubt in my mind that this third budget is not framed within the context of families. It is framed around fleecing families in WA and ruining their future by increasing utility prices to their highest level ever, and around increasing state debt to the highest level ever. Over the forward estimates by 2014–15, state debt will rise to \$22.4 billion. That equates to nearly \$10 000 per person. The interest payment on the debt is already \$1.7 billion annually, and it is on the increase. That amount of \$1.7 billion could buy many things. Of course, anyone who has debt knows that debt is dead money. That is what the government is doing on an annual basis, and it will grow from \$1.7 billion.

This government is also causing immediate and future hardship for thousands of Western Australian families. As I have said, this is not a people's budget; it is a budget that slugs Western Australian families to fund the extravagances of the Premier and his ministers. We need look only at the Premier's palace, which is now running at some \$30 million. That is what it will cost for the planning and all the rest of it. The Minister for Training and Workforce Development had to have new offices at the Optima Centre and he had to rebadge colleges and all these other things. There are a lot of questions about leasing the Optima Centre and whether Western Australians got value for money, but that issue is for another day.

This budget shows that families were hit in the last three budgets with increases in electricity charges totalling 57.3 per cent and water charges totalling 45 per cent. That is an astounding increase. As I say, electricity increases will be borne by the business sector, because power is an input for production. Consequently, there is no doubt that once it is factored into all manner of things, it can be expected to have some inflationary impact. Many businesses in this community are doing it particularly tough. We have a two-speed economy. Instead of making it easier for small, medium and large businesses, this government has a policy that will make it much harder for those businesses to survive. We can look also at the impact of these increases in utility charges on schools, for example. People from the Department of Education have appeared before the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. From memory, the net impact of the increases in power bills across the system for the education department runs to \$100 million. These increases have an enormous impact on government agencies. Obviously, the health department and every other agency that has to pay for utilities will be affected. But those who will be hardest hit are the people within our community, including the ill and the elderly. Many of those people could not afford to turn on their air conditioners during summer because of the cost of electricity. As we approach winter, many of them will not be able to turn on their heaters, simply because it is not affordable for them to do so.

I will quickly touch on the increased funding of \$600 million over the forward estimates to non-government organisations to deal with the growing number of Western Australians forced to use these services.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** Absolutely brilliant!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The minister says that it is absolutely brilliant. No-one in their wildest dreams believes that that is a great initiative. Everyone understands what is going on: the government is creating the crisis and then paying NGOs to fix it. The point I made earlier is that the government should not create the crisis. We can expect an increase in the number of people demanding the services of NGOs. For example, the St Vincent de Paul Society says that demand for its services has gone up 55 per cent in the past couple of years. That demand will increase even further, and it will want additional funding to meet this increased demand for its services. I would say that St Vincent de Paul is not an exception. The demand for these sorts of services will be exceptionally high and will grow right across the board. The minister is being light-hearted about it by saying that this is all okay because the government has just put in some extra money. It is a bit like the hardship utility grant scheme. What an absolutely useless thing that is. I do not know any migrant people who would put in a HUGS application because, quite frankly, many would not be able to get through the paperwork. I would not think that many Indigenous people would be making HUGS applications. I certainly know that no-one in remote communities would be putting in HUGS applications. I think the minister is treating this very light-heartedly indeed. This is a major problem.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** You should be ashamed of the motion you put up today.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I think the minister is raring to make some comments on this motion. She cannot do it by continual interjection, but she will have an opportunity to do so at some later stage in the debate.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It would be refreshing if the minister said something that made some sense just for a change.

I return to the issue of debt. It will be \$22.4 billion by 2014–15. On 30 June 2008, debt was \$1 680 per capita. By 30 June 2011, it will be \$5 698 per capita. By the time we get to 2014–15, we anticipate that that figure will be close to \$10 000 per capita.

Another point I want to touch on is how we deal with growing debt. I imagine that by 2014–15, as debt levels increase, one of the strategies that this government will be forced to consider, if it is still around then, will be privatisation. The minister should not shake his head. We know that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's pre-budget submission to the government in 2009–10 referred to the position that it took on the privatisation of ports. It made it quite clear that it considered that this is one area in which the government should give consideration to privatisation.

**Hon Peter Collier:** But it's not the government.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I know it is not the government, but it has a very important role to play and no doubt has the ear of government. I say to the honourable minister that the only thing that is stopping the government from doing that at this point, apart from the probable public backlash, is that the ports generate a dividend for the government. There is no doubt that, as the pressure comes on for the government to take the debt monkey off its back, it will seriously consider port privatisations. I think there is a privatisation agenda.

Several members interjected.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The Economic Audit Committee, which was part of the government's election commitment for its first 100 days in office and which was provided for in the government's first budget, was billed as the group that would do the work to put forward the strategic economic direction of the state. Since then, it has been absolutely shrouded in secrecy. Clearly, the five or six eminent members of that group either did absolutely nothing or have done something that this government does not want to make public. I would put my money on the latter. There is an agenda. I need only look at members opposite to see how quiet they have all become; they are absolutely dead silent.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** They are so transparent.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Everyone has been quiet at my instruction. As we continually say, the odd constructive, positive interjection is part of the normal debating style. But if you invite interjections you will certainly get them and they will be unruly.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** They just went dead silent—deader than usual!

Several members interjected.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** There is a hidden agenda there; there is no doubt about that. We are a hardworking opposition and we will get to it.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I want to continue my comments. I want to quickly make some comments on broken election commitments. I was commenting on the government making promises. One of the key promises prior to the last election, of course, was to retain Royal Perth Hospital. The Liberal Party campaigned very strongly on the redevelopment of Royal Perth Hospital. It had not done any costings or planning. Everyone asked, "How can they build a new hospital and so forth as well as run Royal Perth Hospital?" But members opposite said, "Oh, it'll be all right; Royal Perth Hospital is a bit of a sacred cow; we'll keep it." Three budgets later and no significant funding has been allocated to redevelop that hospital—only \$10 million in each of the past three budgets. Members opposite have gone back to being dead quiet again.

The Ellenbrook railway line is another one. Again, after three budgets there is no significant funding to build this railway line.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Funding was to be allocated for 2012–13 for planning the Ellenbrook railway line so that it could be relocated to transit concept and feasibility studies associated with the public transport master plan. But the Premier is saying that he never made the commitment; he cannot remember the commitment. But Mr Alban put out posters. Everyone knew a commitment had been made.

**Hon Alyssa Hayden:** Mr Alban?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I said Mr Alban and that is what I intended to say; that is his name. If Hon Alyssa Hayden wants to say it in a different way, she can do so. Fancy not remembering —

Several government members: Five, four, three, two, one!

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan — Minister for Finance)** [10.32 am]: What a lazy looking motion this is. I could not believe it.

Government members: Hear, hear!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I thought it was a joke when we were given notice of today's non-government business. The honourable member could not even be bothered finding a matter of importance to her electorate and to her side of politics to raise in the valuable time of non-government business. Instead, we have this incredible broad-brush motion condemning the Barnett–Grylls government for its dishonest budget, which is “harsh on families and drunk on debt”. What is drunk on debt? I am not sure whether it is the budget or the Barnett–Grylls government. Let us not go into the grammar or syntax of this motion. It represents a lazy exercise from an opposition that has no ideas of its own, as demonstrated by what is on the notice paper.

Let us go back to what is a very fine budget. It was a great privilege to be able to read the budget speech into this place last week. I am sure Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich would have enjoyed it if she had paid attention. Perhaps she should read it because the brief remarks we got out of her today about the budget bore no resemblance to the reality or the context of what was in there.

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Is that Hon Jim Chown? Can he actually speak?

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** This motion shows that Labor is opposed to this government's massive infrastructure program, which is designed to benefit the community at large. The message that we can take from the words of the member who moved this motion and the Labor Party is that Labor does not want the community to benefit from more and better hospitals. Labor does not want children going to new and better schools; it does not want people to have reliable power and water supplies; and it does not want this government to try to ease the traffic jams by investing in roads. Labor gives up easily. Labor does not want public transport expanded and improved in the years ahead.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Don't talk about public transport; you were an embarrassment.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Labor does not want our city's appeal to flourish with a waterfront development.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Labor does not want to see the city's landscape improved by our sinking the rail lines. It does not want to see people who live in regional areas enjoying better facilities and housing. Labor does not want more of our disabled and needy people to have better housing. Labor does not want economic development in regional areas. In short, the Australian Labor Party of Western Australia does not want the government to meet the needs of a growing state and the expectations of our people for an even better society. By contrast, we are delivering what we promised and that is a better government for a better future.

If Labor members want debt lower than forecast—they have big mouths some of them—they should come in here and give us their hit list of these government investment decisions they would cancel if given a chance. What is not needed for the benefit of the community and the economy of Western Australia? Perhaps they would cut road investment by \$200 million a year as they did in 2001. They might reduce investment in power so we can have more power cuts and power crises as we did in 2004. If Labor is not prepared to show what it would cut, perhaps it will tell us which taxes it would raise through the roof—perhaps another 25 per cent increase on stamp duty on homes as it did when it was in office. Maybe Labor would have another go at a premium property tax. Perhaps that is part of its secret agenda, which Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich seems to delight in exploring. Perhaps we should find out which taxes and charges Labor would send through the roof.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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Our total public sector asset investment program will cost vastly more than the Labor Party was ever prepared to invest in this state's future. Our investment program is about \$26.5 billion over the next four years. We will spend an average of \$6.6 billion a year on our asset investment program to build Western Australia. The previous government, despite having billions at its disposal in true windfall revenues, averaged only \$3.2 billion per annum over its time in power. What is more, the costs of its key government projects that it was responsible for all blew out, sometimes by hundreds of per cent. So much for its management; so much for its productivity; and so much for its legacy for Western Australia.

The specifics of our investment and growth programs are contained in the budget. But for the member to suggest—she picked on health, for example—that there are no real increases in health expenditure is simply wrong. We have not only increased expenditure to cover normal CPI; we have also provided growth money to meet higher population projections. Further growth money is included in the health budget as well. The member should look at the budget, because she has obviously not read it.

Again we are investing record sums in education, including growth money and \$850 million for capital infrastructure. In water, we are investing in excess of \$3.5 billion over the next four years. Would Labor slash that? Would it cut those projects that are so vital to Western Australia's future? The honourable member had a few things to say about power bills. Labor claims that the government is trying to fix problems of its own making. I do not know when the government created the problems that it is now addressing, but it certainly did not create them over the past two and a half years. No, we got them from somewhere else. That was never more so than with the question of electricity charges. It was a Labor government, headed by the current Leader of the Opposition—although we do not know how long he will be around—that set us on the path of wrecking what was a good and low-priced electricity system. That is what they did. They promised us competition to reduce prices. They promised us reduced prices across the board. Where are they? What did they deliver? They delivered a policy of freezing electricity prices, knowing that the chickens would have to come home to roost one day. Labor was wrong in all that it did with its electricity policy. Now, everyone in Western Australia is paying the price, whether through increased user charges or through general revenue, to which every taxpayer contributes in some way. Labor Party members need to understand that when they get up and try to talk about dishonesty and about being harsh on families, and make allegations of the government being drunk on debt.

I explained last week the financial basics that showed that we are managing finances well and that the forecast debt levels are well within the bounds of good financial management. We can do it again now with the latest budget figures. Of course we have debt. Indeed, almost every household will have some debt, with most carrying a large debt in the form of a mortgage. Our household debt is affordable if we can meet our obligations within our income. We all know that, and we all have to live it every week. It is the same for government. The debt forecasts are well within our means to manage without resorting to tax increases. There is no dishonesty there. All of our figures about debt are on the public record, including all the provisos that rely on worst-case scenarios and not best-case scenarios; that is what we are dealing with and have made provision for, courtesy of the federal government and its attitude towards GST and royalty payments.

Labor will claim to understand the battle that many families face in keeping up with cost-of-living pressures. Indeed, these pressures were well and truly around when Labor was in government. This government understands the pressures on families as well. That is why we have framed this budget very carefully to minimise the impact as much as we can within a framework of maintaining good financial management, so that families are not hit even harder in the years ahead. Did Labor ever consider the impact of its tax rises on families, such as the stamp duty increases which people faced when buying homes and which added many thousands to their debt and subsequent interest payments? The mover of the motion should tell me that. Did she consider them when she was a member of the cabinet of the day? Apparently not. Now Labor cries crocodile tears for families over utility prices.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** So you don't think families are suffering under utility prices?

**Hon Peter Collier:** That's not what he said.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I will say what I am saying.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** That is exactly what he said.

**Hon Peter Collier:** It was nothing of that kind.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** The Labor Party is now saying —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Let us get to the truth. Labor is now saying that \$4 a week in higher government charges for an average household will send families into financial oblivion. We all know, understand and have sympathy for the fact that there are always families who do it tough regardless.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Now more than ever.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** You can get up and have a shriek in a minute. Do not shriek at me from your chair!

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Let us keep both the comments and the interjections at least on the topic and do not relate them to personal issues that people might have.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I certainly will not be making personal comments. I am sorry if anyone thinks I might do that.

Treasury models the representative household to give some idea of the impact of government charges on an average household. The same exercise was done under Labor. We can see the results of our exercise on page 299 of budget paper No 3, which shows an impact of \$206 per annum, or \$4 per week. Obviously, that is going to differ according to each household's patterns and routines, but it does give a good average indication. Yes, we do regret having to put up charges, but I explained in my budget speech why that is necessary. I remind the house that it was only a couple of years ago that the Howard government's tax cuts of \$5 a week were denounced by Labor here as an insult, yet now that same modest amount is declared by Labor as a major financial strain on families. Again, I state that any addition to pressure on families is something we are sympathetic with. We have been mindful to minimise the impact as much as we can within a framework of the good financial management that our community needs.

Most people understand that governments do not provide things for free—that there is a cost, even if it is not always paid directly by those benefiting from the government spending. Our power and water utilities are like companies that have to meet their costs and have some extra to pay for investment and maintenance to ensure that we actually have water and power supplied. Labor seems to believe, or would have people believe, that we can avoid the cost pressures in those utilities and just freeze prices, like it did before. That is a dishonest stunt. Just last week Labor made the point clear by emphasising that its call for an electricity price freeze, because that is what it has called for —

**Hon Kate Doust:** For 12 months.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** Yes, for 12 months only. That is a political stunt that would temporarily delay the inevitable; a political illusion that prices do not need to rise. That is the lie Labor is trying to sell to the Western Australian public. That is dishonesty. It is something that the mob opposite seems to have been well practised at when in government.

There was nothing of any substance in this motion and certainly not in the painful and shameful excuse for a speech that we endured from the mover of the motion. The irony, of course, is that straight after this we get on to the budget debate. If that is all we can expect from the budget debate, we are going to spend a long, long time enduring it.

Our government is doing things for Western Australia. In contrast, the opposition is devoid of ideas. It is so devoid of ideas that it not only will not or cannot tell us what it would slash if it were ever back in government, but also cannot even come up with a basic, positive, decent issue to debate during non-government business time. The mover of the motion is an embarrassment to her own side and this house should not take much notice of her.

**HON WENDY DUNCAN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary)** [10.48 am]: I welcome the opportunity to respond to this resolution about the Liberal–National government having a dishonest budget.

**Hon Kate Doust:** How many Chubb vans did the National Party line up to take their cash up to the bush? That's what your leader said about it.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** How many Chubb vans have members opposite used in the past to take the cash from the bush and put it into the city and the railway lines?

Several members interjected.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** It is actually about time that those Chubb vans went in the opposite direction!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** I can tell members that regional Western Australians are very pleased with that outcome. When the Nationals campaigned to be part of government in Western Australia and to have the balance of power so that we could get a fair go for regional Western Australians, we also made a commitment to protect the state's AAA credit rating. We are committed to strong state finances because for royalties for regions to have some longevity, we need a state with strong financial management. That is exactly what is happening with this government; the financial management of this government is designed to retain our AAA credit rating, and the Nationals in government support that totally. We have participated in the three per cent efficiency dividend in the past and we have also committed to another one per cent to ensure that we can keep public sector expenditure reined in. I think public sector expenditure growth was near 13 per cent under the previous government and we aim to keep it somewhere near seven per cent. The Nationals are committed to that.

The reason that the Nationals are in an alliance in government is that in joining this government, we negotiated to retain the ability to represent our constituency and to have the freedom to voice our concerns. That is something members opposite do not have; they go to their caucus room and once a decision is made, they are all tied together and there is no opportunity to stand apart and represent the people who elect them to government.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** We have committed to stable and strong government. When matters of importance to regional Western Australia come up, we pursue those through cabinet and the normal channels. We are not about creating unstable government, which is what we see federally at the moment with the Greens putting their head up on every little occasion and making life virtually impossible for Julia Gillard in trying to run this country.

I move now to the comments of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich about power prices and my comments at the budget breakfast in Kalgoorlie. I do not back away from those comments. It is very important for regional people, particularly regional small businesses, to have access to utility prices that enable their businesses to grow and prosper. We know that both power and water are precious resources, they are scarce, they are expensive to produce, and, not only that, greenhouse gases are created in the production of these resources. I am very conscious of the fact that to preserve these precious resources and to reduce our carbon footprint, we need to work towards pricing these commodities near the cost of production.

We also need to be conscious of the fact that metropolitan Perth is a city that is expanding. There are plenty of examples in which the citizens of Perth have stood and objected to urban sprawl; they do not want to see their city extend from one end of the coast to the other. On the other hand, every time there is some talk about putting up a high-rise building, particularly along the Cottesloe beachfront, everybody comes out en masse and objects to that. Where will the Western Australians that we predict will come to our state over the next 20-odd years go? The population is going to double, so we need to ensure that our state is developed in a balanced and sustainable way, which means developing our regional towns and cities. It was very interesting to see the comments of the Grattan Institute the other day that expenditure in the regions should be in the south west where the population growth is. By all means, it should be; in fact; there is expenditure in that area, but that should not be to the detriment of the Pilbara, where our wealth is generated, and the Goldfields, because the population growth is there but it is constrained by the lack of land, housing, power, water, decent hospital facilities and decent education facilities, which are squarely and fairly in the previous government's court!

Several members interjected.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** They were neglected and that is why we are in this situation!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** The previous government miserably failed regional Western Australia!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! One at a time and that is the member on her feet.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** In this recent budget, we have continued to devote royalties for regions funding to those areas of neglect that I just outlined—\$1.2 billion in 2011–12.

**Hon Adele Farina:** And the Grattan report says it's out of proportion and it's not going to deliver the results that you claim.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** It certainly is! The member probably does not get out there much but I travel throughout the Mining and Pastoral Region and I can tell members that the difference is there.

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** In fact, Felicity Jefferies from the WA Country Health Service has herself said that she has not seen expenditure in rural Western Australia in her 30 years with the service. I hate to bring up old ghosts, but one reason that we are in this position is that the past executive director of the WA Country Health Service, Christine O'Farrell, on her retirement said that the health system in regional Western Australia was blatantly "expletive" unsafe. Blatantly unsafe! Mr McGinty said that the Royal Flying Doctor Service is an interest group. That demonstrated a total lack of understanding of the needs of regional Western Australia. Therefore, while the Nationals are working responsibly in government and back the government's aim to maintain the state's AAA credit rating, we retain the right to stand up for our constituents. That is what members of Parliament should do; that is what we are elected for.

**Hon Jim Chown** interjected.

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** Exactly.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon WENDY DUNCAN:** Over the period of this government to 2015, \$1 billion will have been spent on regional health. Every dollar of that is sorely needed. There is \$538 million in this most recent budget to strengthen medical care to try to attract general practitioners into regional areas. We are spending \$220 million on the Mid West investment plan to stimulate economic and social growth. We are spending \$85 million on super towns. There has been talk that this might have been a thought bubble of the Minister for Regional Development, but it is not; it is what governments should do. The government needs to allocate funding for planning so that when an area of growth with established economic potential is identified, it can in good time ensure that it has the land, water, power and communications needed. People wanted to live in Karratha but they could not because rents were \$2 000 a week; people were stuck in containers. We need to think ahead and that is what this is about.

The country local government fund will be continued. Labor is on the record as saying that it will do away with that fund when it gets the next opportunity. This is an excellent program that provides for local governments to make local decisions about their local priorities to fix some of the infrastructure backlog that has developed over decades. Now when I go around my electorate—the Mining and Pastoral Region—which I thoroughly enjoy, I am starting to see those towns look good with the amenities that they need. The really important thing is that the people are feeling so much better, more optimistic and so much more positive. That is what gets people to live and work in regional Western Australia where we need them. People cannot be bribed with funding and we cannot harass them and force them to move; we have to make that place somewhere that they want to live and work. That is the government's responsibility. Then the people will come. Guess what? After that, with more people, there will be more politicians in the regions. That is our ultimate aim.

**HON HELEN BULLOCK (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.59 pm]: Mr President, the best way to deal with nonsense is to ignore it.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I do not think that is the sort of interjection that Hon Helen Bullock invited; she invited the respect of other members to listen to her comments.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Yes, I am addressing you, Mr President; I only have eyes for you!

I will talk about the Minister for Finance, who I think does not realise he is living in the best economic period in Western Australia's history—he is a very lucky man! I remind the Minister for Finance that we are in the middle of the best economic situation we will ever be in. Our dollar is at an all-time high, and the mining boom has generated, as the minister knows, billions and billions more dollars than ever before.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** How's the real estate market going? How's consumer confidence? How are small businesses doing?

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Is that the minister's problem? That is the minister's problem.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** It's everyone's problem.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** You're the Minister for Commerce; do something about it!

Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; President; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Wendy Duncan; Hon Helen Bullock; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alyssa Hayden; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Helen Morton

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**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** Mr President, I have only 10 minutes, and I now have only nine minutes left and I have lots to get through.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** You haven't done much yet!

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** The mining boom has generated billions of dollars for this government. The inflation rate is currently at 3.1 per cent—it cannot get lower than that—and the employment rate is at 4.5 per cent; there is almost full employment. If anybody wants a job, there are two or three jobs waiting for that person. We cannot have better circumstances than these, yet look at this government. Look at the budget and look at the debt level—it is at an all-time high. The government is \$14 billion in the red, and it is projected that Western Australia will have a record debt level of \$20 billion by 2014. The government is hoping that our economy will improve in the next few years so that more income will be generated to pay off this debt.

This budget spends money we do not have and money that the government thinks it will have in the future. I would just like to remind members that this state does not have savings, and it has only two major assets left—namely, the Water Corporation and Western Power. As we heard yesterday from the Minister for Energy during question time, they are not for sale at the moment but the economic situation may change in the future, if not soon, and I think that by then it will not be up to the government to decide whether to sell the assets or not. By then it will have no choice; it will have to sell them.

Let us come back to reality. According to the figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2009 the average income in Western Australia was about \$54 000. In 2010, the average income was about \$56 000. The current inflation rate is at 3.1 per cent, and by using that figure we can roughly estimate the average income for 2011; it is about \$57 000. I would have thought that a family with a combined income of double the average income should get by all right—they should, at least, not need to ask for help to pay their utility bills. That is not the case.

The Sakiri family, as reported in *The Weekend West* of 2 April 2011, has a combined income of \$110 000 per annum. The family has two school-age kids, and recently the family has been pushed over the edge. They have had to ask a charity for a food parcel to feed the family, and they have had to ask a family member to help with their mortgage repayments. According to the Sakiri family, everything goes into the mortgage and bills. They say that electricity and gas has gone through the roof, but they just do not seem to be able to keep up. According to my notes, they said, "It was a big shame and not a nice feeling to need to take things from a charity or family member, but we had to ask for help."

The Robbins family, as reported by *The West Australian* on 21 May 2011, has a combined income of \$100 000, which is just about twice the average income. That family manages a little better than the Sakiri family, but still, after paying the weekly expenses, there is nothing left. At the moment they have not had to ask charities for help, but there is no doubt that they are sitting on the edge, and with the next round of increases in utility bills I am sure that they will be the first to fall.

The Sakiri and Robbins families are typical middle-income families in Western Australia. They are struggling to cope with the reality of ever-increasing utility bills and the cost of living. While many middle-income families struggle to cope with the day-to-day cost of living, it is unimaginable how pensioners and low-income earners are coping. Stories abound of pensioners suffering through the long hot summer we have just had without putting on their air conditioning because they cannot afford to pay the electricity bills. Instead of easing their suffering, the Premier actually declared that Perth residents do not need air conditioning for the Perth summer; I just hope that the Premier has been living by example.

Many of these pensioners will be facing the long winter months without being able to turn on their heating. Diana Ryan, as reported in *The West Australian* of 23 May 2011, is one such disabled pensioner who has struggled over the past two years with the rising cost of utilities. According to her, she has survived two years of price rises, but cannot deal with a third. She had to give in and apply for a hardship utility grant last month. More than 50 Western Australian households a day are applying for the hardship grant, and yet this so-called people's budget does not address the issue, except to provide increased funding for not-for-profit organisations to provide counselling for those people in hardship. I thought it was quite crude to, on the one hand, take money away from those people, and on the other hand employ somebody to counsel those people.

**Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich:** They don't need counselling; they need money.

**Hon HELEN BULLOCK:** That is not the way to deal with it, Mr President.

Each time I read this kind of story I have to remind myself that these kinds of things are happening during our best economic situation. All members should think about the debt that this government has incurred and think

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about those families out there who are struggling—middle-income families included—to pay their electricity bills, water bills, and gas bills, and who are struggling with the cost of living and trying to put food on the table.

**HON ADELE FARINA (South West)** [11.10 am]: I am pleased to support this motion.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! Let me explain. This is a matter of non-government business. Normally, the third member to speak on the motion would be, I would have thought, a member of the Greens party. But the Greens were not here at the time. Therefore, I went with the other party, the National Party, and that then caused the two sides to be out of kilter. So I am just restoring that balance.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Thank you, Mr President.

I am pleased to support the motion moved by Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. It is unfortunate that we find ourselves in a position in which we need to move a motion such as this. When we peel away the government's spin on this budget and carefully examine the assumptions on which this budget is based, we discover significant dishonesty, and assumptions that at best are fragile. That gives the people of Western Australia real cause for concern. The government has sold this budget as a people's budget. That suggests that this budget will deliver great benefits for the people of Western Australia, and they will welcome and be very pleased with this budget. However, we know that is not the case. The government's spin is dishonest, in that it inaccurately describes what is in this budget and what it will deliver to the people of Western Australia.

I do not have time to give this issue the justice that it deserves. But in the short time that is available to me, I want to address some of the issues with this budget. This is the third year in a row that this government has delivered massive increases in household costs for the people of this state. Those costs are crippling household budgets. So, this is not a people's budget. It is a mean budget. The government has brought down a budget that demonstrates a blatant disregard for the many people in Western Australia who are doing it tough. This includes pensioners and self-funded retirees. It also includes an increasingly growing number of families who in the past were considered to be middle income earners on a good wage who should be able to manage. Well, they cannot manage any more. Many people are doing it very tough. People who are already doing it tough are being slugged even harder because of this government's policy settings. This budget is not about good financial management. This budget does not address the real needs and problems that are facing the people of Western Australia. This budget delivers a hit to Western Australia families, just so that this government can keep on spending. This government's failure to rein in its spending is delivering real pain to Western Australian families. Since the Barnett government was elected, electricity prices have soared by a massive 46 per cent, with another five per cent increase in this year's budget. Water prices have increased by a massive 45 per cent. These are not easily accommodated increases in the budgets of people who are trying to survive from pay packet to pay packet. These increases are crippling for those people.

It is also interesting to highlight the dishonesty in this budget. The government's spin was that the increase in water costs in this budget was 8.5 per cent. However, that does not include sewerage costs and drainage costs. When we put that together with the increase in water costs, the increase in this year's budget is actually 13.9 per cent. This is an illustration of the dishonesty that is built into the government's spin and sale of this budget.

This budget is not a people's budget. It does not support people who are struggling. All it is doing is whacking the people of this state yet again with a massive sledgehammer. The government used that sledgehammer in its past two budgets. It is now giving the people of this state another hit with that sledgehammer in this budget. For the standard representative household, the Barnett government has delivered an increase of nearly 7.5 per cent in household costs in just three years. There is no way, with those sorts of cost increases, that we could say this is a people's budget. This budget does absolutely nothing to keep down the costs for families. It does absolutely nothing to help people who are struggling financially. Despite all the evidence that the massive increases in household costs are crippling Western Australian families, and our call for a freeze in this budget on an increase in those household costs, to give people who are struggling the opportunity to breathe and catch up, this government has arrogantly ignored that evidence and that call and has whacked the people of Western Australia yet again with more increases in household costs. Why has the government done that? It is because it is not financially responsible and cannot rein in its own spending. That is the reason Western Australian families are being slugged in this way.

We have all had constituents come into our offices asking for help because of the financial difficulties they are facing, and we have all read stories in *The West Australian* about people who are struggling. Unfortunately I do not have time this morning to go into those stories. But we all know them, and we all have to deal with them on a daily basis. The honest truth is that in this budget, families are being hit yet again because of this government's failure to rein in its spending.

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The government has sought to soften the blow about its inability to manage its finances by saying that it will be giving \$600 million to welfare agencies. The government expects to be congratulated, because it is increasing funding to welfare agencies, yet it is the policies of this government that are forcing more and more people into the arms of welfare agencies. This is senseless, and the people of Western Australia can see through it. A caring government with good policy settings would reduce the number of people needing the assistance of welfare agencies, rather than push more and more people into the arms of welfare agencies. It is also interesting that the government has refused to declare how much of that \$600 million will be used to deliver additional services to the community. The reality is that a decision by Fair Work Australia has said that we need to address the 30 per cent discrepancy in the wages that are paid to people employed by non-government organisations. As a result of that decision, a massive part of that \$600 million spend will need to be put towards wages costs. Many of the welfare agencies will need to employ extra staff to deliver any additional services. We know from the advice that has been given to us by welfare agencies that approximately 80 per cent of the money that they receive is used for wages costs. Therefore, only a tiny amount of that \$600 million will go towards delivering additional services to the community of Western Australia. When we compare how much the people of Western Australia have been whacked by increases in household costs, and the spend by welfare agencies, it is disproportionate. Therefore, that \$600 million is not going to reach the people who desperately need this help. It is just dishonest of the government to say that it is going to soften the blow. A caring and more sensible government would have reduced the need for people in Western Australia to go to welfare agencies in the first place.

**Hon Simon O'Brien** interjected.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Unfortunately for people with a disability, there will be very few increases in services. That is because of this government's inability to identify the way in which it has allocated this funding.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Members should not yell interjections across the chamber. It does not help the debate at all. Hon Adele Farina.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Mr President, unfortunately I am not going to get through even half of what I have to say.

Despite the fact that the government has acknowledged, through its increase in funding for the hardship utility grant scheme, that an increasing number of people need that assistance, the government has not increased the cap on the amount of money that people can get from HUGS. That means that people who were already struggling before the additional increases in utility charges in this budget will not be able to get any more help out of HUGS.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** How much is it in the south west and the north west?

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** It is \$450 in the south west.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** It has been increased from when you were in government.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** Yes, but the government has not increased it any further to accommodate the increases in household costs in this budget.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** We have so!

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** The government has not! That is the truth.

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** We've put more money into HUGS.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** This is just another example of the dishonesty in the government spin on what it is doing. The other problem with the hardship utility grant scheme funding is the difficulty in accessing it. People need to consult a financial adviser before they can apply for HUGS funding. The reality is that people who are struggling cannot afford to go to a private financial adviser. They need to go to one of the financial advisers provided by the welfare agencies, but the wait lines to get in to see one of those —

**Hon Robyn McSweeney:** There are more of them.

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** There are not; the government has not delivered any more in this budget. People simply cannot get to a financial adviser to access HUGS funding if they are struggling financially. This is just another example of how this government has not bothered to address the real issues out there in the community to help those people who are really struggling.

**HON ALYSSA HAYDEN (East Metropolitan)** [11.20 am]: Mr President —

**Hon Sue Ellery** interjected.

**Hon Kate Doust:** Give it to Jim! We never hear from Jim!

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**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Sorry, ladies, you have got me!

Mr President, I rise obviously to speak against this ridiculous and offensive motion. I say “offensive” because of the language that has been used. I have sat in this place for two years now and listened to so many words that have come out —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! It does not matter who is on their feet, the rules stay the same. The member on their feet has the floor and should address their comments through the Chair, and other members have an obligation to listen.

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Thank you, Mr President. As I said, I have sat in this place for two years and witnessed and listened to the eccentric and bizarre words that have been uttered out of the mouth of Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich. I must say that this one has taken the cake —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Dishonest—surely the member is not referring to the historical \$1 billion that this government has allocated to the vulnerable groups in our community. Corrupt—surely the word “dishonest”, which alludes to being corrupt, is not what the member is applying to and meaning about the hardworking groups in our community such as Centrecare, St Bartholomew’s House, Mercy Community Services and the Salvation Army. I mention a few in Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich’s electorate in case she has not been out there lately: Gosnells Women’s Health Service; Hills Community Support Group—surely it is not corrupt; Holyoake—surely it is not corrupt.

Several members interjected.

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Parkerville Children and Youth Care —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** I am guessing Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich does not mean that they are corrupt because they are taking money dishonestly from this government.

Several members interjected.

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Another word for “dishonesty” —

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Hon ADELE FARINA:** I think that the member needs to withdraw the statements that she has made that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has suggested the welfare agencies are corrupt. There was nothing in Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich’s address to the motion that could even lead anywhere near a suggestion that she was saying that welfare agencies are corrupt. That is dishonest, it is untruthful, and the member should, in my view, be asked to withdraw those statements.

**The PRESIDENT:** When a member moves a motion that uses terms like “dishonest” and “drunk on debt” and so on, they have introduced those terms into the debate in a general sense. I do not think either the mover of the motion or other speakers are suggesting that anybody or any organisation directly is one of those terms. But having the words introduced into the debate means that the words inevitably will be used by all speakers in a general sense. I have been listening to what the member is saying and that is what I believe she is saying at the moment. But I will keep a close ear on the way the terms are used. Is there a further point of order?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** There is. Mr President, I seek clarification of your response to the point of order taken by Hon Adele Farina. There is rigorous language in the motion and I take your point that rigorous language is to be expected in the response to the motion. However, Hon Alyssa Hayden said that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was suggesting that welfare agencies, and she named several including the Hills Community Support Group, were corrupt.

**Hon Alyssa Hayden:** She wasn’t. I’m sure she wasn’t.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** That is not what Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich even traversed in a general sense, never mind said anything like that.

**Hon Alyssa Hayden:** And I didn’t say she was. I didn’t say she said it. Read *Hansard*.

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**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Mr President, that is the proposition that you are being asked to consider as unparliamentary. Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich has not suggested—no-one on this side has suggested—anything about the welfare agencies, never mind that they are corrupt.

**Several members interjected.**

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I believe the issue has been raised in a rhetorical sense, not in a direct accusatorial sense. On that basis, there is no point of order. Is there a further point of order?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Yes.

**The PRESIDENT:** Hon Helen Morton and Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich are on their feet. Hon Helen Morton.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I want to make a correction to a statement that the Leader of the Opposition made in regard to —

**Hon Kate Doust:** That's not a point of order.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** It is a point of order. The point of order is that the member misled the house about what Hon Alyssa Hayden was saying. Hon Alyssa Hayden made it very clear that she understood that that was not what Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was suggesting; that is, that this, that or the other organisation was corrupt. I do not want anybody to suggest that Hon Alyssa Hayden was suggesting that Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich was saying that about the organisations. She said they were not corrupt.

**Hon Kate Doust:** What point was she trying to make?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! That is a point of view, not a point of order. Does Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich have a further point of order?

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** Yes, I do, Mr President. I think the comment you have made about the rigorous nature of the motion and reference to a dishonest budget is quite separate from making an allegation that I had said that the NGOs were corrupt.

**Hon Helen Morton:** She didn't say that.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I may well have said that the government might be corrupt in dealing with the NGOs, but —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** This is serious, because the issue here is that if a member alleges that another member has said something that they have not said and then goes out of this house and uses it —

Several members interjected.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** The minister is not here.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members! Let us hear the point of order and then we will see where it goes from there.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** It is a real issue, because if I am to then put words into the mouths of other members of this place, we will be on a very downward, slippery slope. It is one thing to refer to a dishonest budget—that is just everyday political language—it is another thing to allege that a member has actually said that NGOs are corrupt.

**Hon Helen Morton:** We didn't say that.

**Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH:** I will be interested to see *Hansard*. I do not recall having made that statement. The member may well have misheard what I have said, but if she has misheard, I think she has probably intentionally misheard something that she would have liked me to have said.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I have already stated that I believe the words were being used in a rhetorical sense and not in a personal, accusatorial sense. That is the ruling on all the points of order.

*Debate Resumed*

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Thank you, Mr President. I have two minutes left; thank you very much to all members for participating!

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I would like to go back to saying why I find this motion offensive. It is because of the language used by the member putting forward the motion.

**Hon Kate Doust:** Who typed your speech for you?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** It is not typed. They are notes. I am allowed to have those. Does Hon Kate Doust not know how to use a computer?

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** I have to say that I took offence at the motion because the word “dishonest” was used, and the word “dishonest” can also mean “corrupt”. So, I was saying that we are not corrupt by donating money to these needy, community groups that require our help. We are not corrupt in supplying money to groups such as Centrecare, the Gosnells Women’s Health Service and the Hills Community Support Group. It is not corrupt, and it is sad to hear that members on the other side would suggest so. Another word for dishonest is “devious”. Are members opposite saying that we are deviously going into schools and installing air-cooling systems?

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members!

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** Shame on us if we are deviously installing air coolers in schools to make classrooms cooler for students to learn in!

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! There is only about a minute left in the debate, and I want the last minute to be conducted according to the rules of this house. The rules are that the member on their feet has the attention of the house and everybody else is obliged to listen.

**Hon ALYSSA HAYDEN:** When a word such as “dishonest” is used in a motion, it stirs up emotions in members on both sides of the chamber. That is why I have taken this lead. Another word for dishonest that has been used in this chamber is “lying”. We are not lying about building the Midland health campus. When the concrete foundation is poured, I want the people of the East Metropolitan Region to understand that it is not a lie; it is actually happening. They can believe that the campus will be built when the concrete is poured. We are putting money into Joondalup Health Campus. It is not a lie. We are doing these things.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! With that flurry of interjection, time has now expired.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! There is further business of the house to conduct.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to temporary orders.