

Speaker; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Tony O’Gorman; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Janet Woollard

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**ELECTRICITY BILLS — INCREASES**

*Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mr G.A. Woodhams):** I today received within the prescribed time a letter from the Leader of the Opposition in the following terms —

I wish to raise the following as a matter of public interest today.

“That the House —

Condemns the Barnett Government for its savage jump in electricity bills across;

- The Jandakot electorate, specifically the suburbs of Banjup; Atwell; and Leeming and;
- The Wanneroo electorate, specifically the suburbs of Mariginiup, Wangara, and Gngangara.”

The matter appears to me to be in order.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

**The SPEAKER:** The matter can proceed.

**MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.05 pm]: I move —

That the house condemns the Barnett government for its savage jump in electricity bills across the Jandakot electorate, specifically the suburbs of Banjup, Atwell and Leeming, and the Wanneroo electorate, specifically the suburbs of Mariginiup, Wangara and Gngangara.

We have spoken on many occasions in this house about the government’s 57 per cent increase to date in electricity prices. We have also spoken about the government’s plans, as revealed in the budget papers, for another 30 per cent increase over the next three years. The Premier has sought to dismiss the evidence of the budget papers, but that 30 per cent proposed increase has been confirmed by comments of the Minister for Energy Hon Peter Collier. Flowing from the evidence of the electricity utilities to upper house parliamentary committees, we also have disturbing evidence of the potential for even bigger price rises. We have spoken a lot about the extent of the increases but we have spoken about them in high-level percentage terms; we have not come down to see what these price increases mean for the bills that arrive in people’s letterboxes.

WA Labor asked questions of the government about the average electricity bill issued in the first four months of 2009 and the average electricity bill issued in the first four months of this year, suburb by suburb. We have asked about the average two-month bill issued across a rolling four-month period in summer 2009 and summer 2011. The results are very interesting. Take, for example, the seat of Wanneroo. Member for Wanneroo, in Mariginiup the increase in the average bill between 2009 and 2011 is \$212.77. The increase in Wangara is \$192.57 and in Gngangara the increase is \$164.04. Therefore, I will be very interested to hear the member for Wanneroo’s participation in this debate and hear him defend why his government has seen those big increases in the average electricity bills issued to the member’s constituents. I think that the member for Wanneroo’s constituents would be very interested to know what he has to say and whether he agrees with the extent of the increases that they are experiencing or what action the member proposes to take to moderate future increases. In the seat of Jandakot, the figures show that in Banjup there has been a \$155.49 increase, in Atwell it is a \$104.83 increase and in Leeming it is a \$101.17 increase. The member for Jandakot is usually very enthusiastic to participate in parliamentary debate, so I am very keen to hear whether he supports what has been done to his constituents and whether he supports the government’s evident intention to have at least a 30 per cent increase in electricity bills should the government, including the member, be re-elected in March 2013. But these are not the only increases. The member for Southern River might be interested to know that there has been a \$100.83 increase in average bills from 2009 to 2011 in Southern River. In Canning Vale there has been an \$81.42 increase. The member for Riverton is in the house, so I will advise him that the increase in Shelley is \$91.92 and in Rossmoyne it is \$98.91. I am wondering whether I have the figure for the Treasurer’s electorate—perhaps not—but I do note that the member for Swan Hills is present. It would be interesting to have the member for Swan Hills defend the \$174.12 increase in Red Hill, the \$131.92 increase in Hazelmere and the \$111.50 increase in Jane Brook.

**Mr F.A. Alban:** Get your facts right!

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** So the member for Swan Hills does not care about Hazelmere! We all accept that the member for Swan Hills does not care about Hazelmere.

Several members interjected.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** Unfortunately —

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** I am sorry, Mr Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** That is all right, Leader of the Opposition. I ask members, particularly those to my right, to cease interjecting. I know you may have been tempted to interject but I ask you to cease interjecting.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** What a shame it is that the member for Morley seems to be temporarily absent from the house. He could talk about the \$97.53 increase in Nollamara and the \$91.36 increase in Dianella. We also seem to be missing the member for Mount Lawley on this important issue of family bills. If the member for Mount Lawley were present in the house to debate this very important issue, he could explain to us why there has been a \$153.04 increase in Coolbinia and a \$97.33 increase in Menora.

There are therefore challenges for each one of the government members representing those seats. They cannot come into this place and back a government without being prepared to defend to their constituents what the government is actually doing to them. It is not as though the Barnett government is somehow separate from the member for Swan Hills, or the member for Riverton, or the member for Wanneroo, or the member for Southern River, or the member for Jandakot, or the member for Mount Lawley, or the member for Morley. They are all part of the Barnett government, they all keep it in power and they each have to take responsibility for the savage increases in electricity prices that their constituents have been forced to endure.

Several members interjected.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** When we look at the results suburb by suburb, it is interesting to note that some suburbs appear to be more vulnerable than other suburbs to this government program of price increases. It may well be that some suburbs, particularly outer metropolitan suburbs, have more families, larger houses and that feature that the Premier calls a luxury—air conditioning. It may well be that this program of electricity price increases is an attack on the living standards of people in the outer suburbs because of their particular vulnerability to increases in electricity prices. I know that government members, being good government members—perhaps apart from the member for Southern River—have been out in the community loyally defending the savage increases in electricity prices and that they have probably been running all the excuses that the Premier has been running. I therefore probably do not need to remind them of those excuses, but I thought I might run through them so that they can understand why they are not washing with the people of Western Australia.

The first excuse from the Premier for these price increases is, “We have to charge what it costs to produce electricity.” That is the excuse of cost reflectivity. What the government does not tell the people of Western Australia, or even admit in this house, is that the budget papers and the financial plan across four years indicate that the government plans to take \$2.7 million a day in clear profit out of the electricity and water utilities. We therefore go to the budget papers, look at the tariff subsidy and take the tariff subsidy away from the dividend and the income tax equivalent payments and we are left with an amount that, if divided by the number of days across four years, gives \$2.7 million a day. The government has found it very hard to admit this; \$2.7 million a day in clear profit is what the government’s own budget papers say.

**Mr C.C. Porter:** What are you counting as the subsidies in that calculation?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** I am counting what the government identifies as the tariff subsidy. I have not taken account of the pensioner concessions.

**Mr C.C. Porter:** Ah!

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** That is because they have been in the system for a long time. I am taking the government’s explanation of what it says is the cause of its program of increases. Pensioner subsidies have been in the system for 25 years and therefore cannot be regarded as the cause of what the government is doing.

**Mr C.C. Porter:** So, have you taken HUGS into account?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** No, I have not taken the hardship utility grant scheme into account. Why should I take HUGS into account? People have to go and beg for HUGS. People have to front up to a financial counsellor. Of course there ought to be assistance schemes for people who are facing difficulties, but I am not going to take HUGS into the calculation when it is the profit derived by the government that is driving people to the humiliation of having to seek a HUGS grant.

The second excuse given by the government is: “Labor froze prices, that was irresponsible and we had to make a different decision.” Let me say this: comparing Labor’s freezing of the prices to what is happening now is just another way of saying that Labor looks after families and the conservatives do not.

Several members interjected.

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** If members go back over 20 years and compare the price rises when the Premier was the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the Court government, the price rises when Labor was in power and the

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price rises now, they would see a really significant difference between the records of the parties. They would see big increases under Richard Court, big increases under the Barnett government and very small increases in the total basket of charges while Labor was in power.

The third excuse of the government is astonishing. It just shows such gall, such hypocrisy, such hide and such a lack of regard for the truth. The third excuse is, “Labor left the debt and we have to pay the debt back.” The state debt when this government came to power was \$3.634 billion. It has nearly quadrupled since this government has been in power. The government’s own projections—if it wants to talk projections—shows that the debt is heading for \$23 billion. When we think about all the back-of-the-envelope decisions that the Premier has taken and all the press releases announced in the media by the government, but that the Under Treasurer says are not really government decisions, it is pretty disturbing to think that the debt will burst through that \$23 billion barrier.

The fourth excuse is, “It is all the fault of the split-up of Western Power and the establishment of a competitive electricity market.” Things would be a lot worse now if it were not for the fact that we have a competitive electricity market—the cost would be higher. The demonstration of that is the government having taken not one single action after three years in government to change that. There has been no re-merger of Western Power. Instead we have had some loose talk from the Premier whenever he is under pressure on electricity prices. The problem with that loose talk is that it is damaging in itself, because it undermines the confidence of the private sector in investment in generation. It therefore has the effect of reducing the potential for competition in the industry and increasing the pressure for future power stations to be funded by the government. In fact, the Premier is actually making the situation worse with that irresponsible thought bubble argument that he trots out every time he is under pressure —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** So you are pro-privatisation of electricity are you?

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** The Premier is the one who had a plan for privatisation. Remember “The Path to Privatisation” that the Premier, when he was the Minister for Energy, had David Eiszele prepare? That document came to light when we were in power—“The Path to Privatisation”. The Premier, when he was Minister for Energy, was underinvesting in the network, fattening up Western Power and getting ready to privatise it; that is what he was doing. Therefore, he cannot talk about privatisation. And, he sold the Dampier to Bunbury natural gas pipeline to someone who did not have the capacity or the willingness to expand it; he gave them an irresponsible undertaking that could not be delivered upon on the tariff, and the lack of expansion of the pipeline put at serious risk the security of our electricity system. It was only the Labor government that finally got the pipeline into hands in which it has been responsibly expanded. Therefore, the Premier’s record on privatisation has been very, very damaging to the state. Let us not forget that he privatised AlintaGas as well; what a great success the privatisation of Alinta has been!

There is one issue that I really think needs to be mentioned, because this issue is not just about electricity charges; it is about the whole basket of charges that the state government puts on families. Okay; the Premier says he has to increase electricity prices to match the cost of production. Why did he have to increase the waste levy? Why did he have to have a savage increase in the emergency services levy? Surely, if there was a problem with electricity prices, the government would be modest and moderate in the other increases that it imposes. But, no, the government has resorted to the budgets of Western Australian families to fill budget black holes in the Department of Environment and Conservation and in the Fire and Emergency Services Authority that the government created by withdrawing budget funds from those two organisations. I expect that the members for Wanneroo and Jandakot will enter this debate, because we have specifically raised issues about their electorates and we want to see them on the record telling their constituents what they think about this issue—telling their constituents whether they defend the actions of their Premier or maybe saying something else. Now is their chance to tell their constituents what they think about this issue.

I conclude with this final statement. People might ask: Why have we raised this matter? Why have we conducted this research? Why have we brought this matter to the house? We have done it for this reason: in politics we often use percentages, we often talk jargon, and we use terms like “cost reflectivity”. In the end, I think people develop statistics fatigue, people develop a hardness, and people do not understand what is actually happening to the families of Western Australia. Therefore, we sought to translate all of this into what it means for actual price increases in actual bills in actual suburbs for actual Western Australian families. We have done that to bring home to government members, the Premier and government ministers exactly what pain they are causing with their decisions. That is why we have done this. I hope that government members, ministers, and even the Premier, confronted with this information, will think again about the evils of their plan to increase electricity prices by yet another 30 per cent following the very damaging 57 per cent increase to date.

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**MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier)** [3.24 pm]: I find it somewhat intriguing that the opposition would again focus on electricity and energy costs on the very day that their masters in Canberra pass the carbon tax legislation. We just wonder whether they got the phone call from Julia —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, members!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Is it a coincidence? Were opposition members instructed or are they just so stupid that they did not realise?

A government member: Stupid.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Probably.

It is important that members contemplate what has happened today, because they have brought on a motion about electricity prices, so allow me to tell and remind the public of Western Australia what the Labor Party in Canberra has done today. I understand —

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Member for Forrestfield!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I understand from the Leader of the Opposition that the Labor Party in Western Australia and the Leader of the Opposition support the carbon tax.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** We support a cut in income tax; we support a rise in pensions.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Do you support the carbon tax?

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** We support the carbon tax compensation. Do you support the compensation?

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.R. Mitchell):** Member for Joondalup, I think you were seeking the call; you will have your time later. The Leader of the Opposition had reasonable quiet when he presented his case. I think the same should apply to the Premier presenting his case.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** It is an important issue of public policy. The carbon tax is an issue that has been debated in Australia in recent years, and it is an important matter of public record. The people of Western Australia have a right to know: do the Leader of the Opposition and the Western Australian Labor Party support the carbon tax? Yes or no—do they?

[The Speaker took the chair.]

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Do they support it?

Several members interjected.

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Riverton! If you wish to speak, member for Riverton, I will give you the call. At this stage I formally call you to order. Members to my left —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I formally call you to order for the third time today. I presume that this is a serious matter you have raised, Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** It certainly is, Mr Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** Yes; I would hope everyone in this place treats it as such.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The Liberal–National government does not support the carbon tax for a variety of reasons that were made public. It is important for the understanding of public policy in Western Australia that the Labor Party and the state Parliament and —

**Mr M. McGowan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Rockingham!

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**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** — that the Leader of the Opposition has either the courage or the credibility to state the position of his party. Do you support it or do you not?

Several members interjected.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** You’re the one who put up power prices.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Kwinana, I formally call you to order for the first time today. Some of you in this place probably want to stay in this place; that would be my impression, as that is why you are here. Some of you are going the right way to not being here.

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** I have a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** It had better be a good point of order, member for Rockingham.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Yes, Mr Speaker; when the Premier yells across the chamber to members opposite inviting interjections and members interject and are then called to order for doing so, it seems to me that the Premier ought to be called to order and told that his role is to answer the question contained in the matter of public interest, not to come up with other extraneous matters and scream abuse at the opposition.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order, member for Rockingham. I will make that judgement.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Mr Speaker —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Premier —

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I have the call; the Leader of the Opposition has spoken. The question is —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** You have asked a question. Do you want me to answer?

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I will ask the question again, because it is a matter of importance in public policy whether the Leader of the Opposition supports the carbon tax and whether the Labor Party of Western Australia supports the carbon tax. If he does do, he should have the courage and integrity to say so. If he does not, he should also say so. Because, unless the Leader of the Opposition can answer this question either yes or no, he has no credibility and no substance in the eyes of the public of Western Australia; he has none if he cannot answer that simple question.

Seeing as we are talking about electricity prices, I remind members opposite that the Labor carbon tax—maybe the Gillard–Ripper carbon tax, I do not know; we will wait for the answer—will increase electricity prices in the state by an estimated seven per cent. That means a \$111 increase in electricity prices. It will also increase public transport fares by 1.9 per cent or \$13.25 a year. It will also increase water charges by an average of one per cent.

**Mr W.J. Johnston** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Cannington, I formally call you to order for the third time today.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Clearly it will have a significant impact on household cost of living.

**Ms J.M. Freeman:** Yes, which is compensated.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** If that is the member’s view, then she should stand up and indicate that she supports the carbon tax. Does she support it? If the member for Nollamara has an opinion, here is her chance to stand up for her electorate and state her position. What is her position? Does she support it? Do any members of the opposition support it?

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I would like to see some progress on this matter of public importance. These sorts of circumstances are not helping.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** From the reactions of members opposite, the only member who has had the internal fortitude to express his view is the member for Bassendean, who clearly indicates he supports it. Not one other member has been willing to stand up in this chamber and indicate that they support the carbon tax.

*Point of Order*

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** I seek assistance from you, Mr Speaker. I have been called to order three times and I am not allowed to interject, so I do not understand how I can answer the Premier’s question.

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**The SPEAKER:** I cannot provide you with any assistance at this stage, member for Cannington.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Can I make it easier for members? Hands up, members opposite, who supports the carbon tax. One, two, three, four, five—five members of the opposition support the carbon tax; only five. At least five members opposite indicate they support the carbon tax. I assume the remaining opposition members do not support it. They can expect an email from Julia in the morning. They will be called to order, because the majority of Labor Party members do not support the carbon tax. They have no integrity and no substance—none at all.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members! Some of you might be enjoying yourselves.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Warnbro, I would like to keep you in this place. I suggest all members reflect on what they are trying to do and what they are trying to represent—all of you to my right and to my left. I do not think it is a very satisfactory way to proceed with an MPI.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Given that very lukewarm reaction —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Premier, by interjection, you have asked me a lot of questions. Do you want an answer?

**The SPEAKER:** The Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I have the call, I believe. I take it from that response that five members opposite are prepared to say that they support the carbon tax. I feel bound to correspond with my friend the Prime Minister and point out to her that only five members of the Labor Party in Western Australia could be found who support the carbon tax. They have no substance, no integrity, no courage and no accountability to the people of Western Australia.

The carbon tax is going to have a significant impact on Western Australia. Will it help meet the cost of providing electricity? No. It is quite strange: I have heard members who support the carbon tax and indeed members of the federal Parliament make comments such as, “Electricity prices should not go up.” Do they not get it? The whole point of the carbon tax is to push up electricity prices on the assumption that people will use less electricity or find other alternatives. That is the whole premise of the carbon tax. Members opposite do not support it so I guess it does not matter, but the whole premise of the carbon tax is to raise electricity prices. They will go up, and they will go up by seven per cent or \$111 by, I assume, not state Labor policy but federal Labor policy. I think the Leader of the Opposition is going to get a phone call from Julia. I think she is going to ring him and say, “Young Eric, you’ve got a problem. Remember: we control you. We tell you what to do. You don’t have an independent say.”

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Members of the house are meant to be referred to by their title and not by their first names. I ask the Premier to be reminded of that fact.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Rockingham, you make an excellent point. Premier, I insist that at any point in this process you refer to members by their office.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I apologise.

The carbon tax structure will have some impact but it will be very marginal. In my view it is a very ineffective policy, but that is not the debate. By the federal government’s own measures, by 2020 and onwards at least 60 per cent of expenditure raised through this tax and abatement by companies will flow overseas. By 2050 we will have spent an estimated \$57 billion of Australian money offshore on carbon abatement measures. How dopey is that? If we are going to raise a tax and raise money for carbon abatement, surely we would spend it in our own country and not in other countries. This tax is absolute lunacy. There are a lot of better ways, a lot of easier ways, a lot of surer ways of reducing carbon emissions.

Returning to the Western Australian scene, a lot has been said —

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** Do you support direct action?

**Extract from *Hansard***

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 8 November 2011]

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**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** The member for Bassendean can make his speech; I look forward to it. Yes, I do; the direct action we should be taking is using gas for power generation across Australia, which would reduce emissions by five per cent with no cost to anyone.

Let me go back to the history. The Leader of the Opposition made claims about electricity prices increasing during the Richard Court government. I happened to be the energy minister, and, yes, they did increase in 1997 by 3.75 per cent. There was no increase in any of the other seven years. The utility continued to trade at a profit. How was that done? Was it magic; was it sleight of hand?

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Forrestfield, I am going to ask you to remove that item.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Eight years and only one small, modest increase in line with the inflation rate in one year only. It was done by efficiencies within the organisation—reducing staffing levels, reducing a whole lot of excess procedures and the like. It was done by efficiencies—real gains in efficiency. Compare that to the record of Labor. Who was it? Of course it was the Leader of the Opposition, the then hapless energy minister.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Outmanoeuvred you!

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Brilliant job! I seemed to be able to keep electricity prices stable and have the utility make a profit.

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I did. One-year increase—3.75 per cent.

**Mr P. Papalia** interjected.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** Go away, child. Stop waving your flags around. It is very immature.

I remind members of what the Leader of the Opposition said about his so-called reforms —

These reforms will deliver substantial and sustainable benefits to Western Australian consumers and the economy, through greater competition and lower electricity prices.

That was in 2002. In 2003 he said —

... in other words, compared with what would happen if we were to stay with the status quo—electricity prices will fall by 8.5 per cent by 2010.

I have not seen it. Did they fall? No; they have gone up. He left us with a massive debt, a massive problem. The Leader of the Opposition promised lower electricity prices, by 8.5 per cent. It did not happen. What happened as a result of the Leader of the Opposition? He created four corporations, each with a board, resulting in board sitting fees increasing from \$393 000 to \$1.5 million. The number of full-time equivalent staff in our four utilities—this is where the money went—went from 2 919 people in 2006 to 4041 to 2009. No wonder the profits and returns started to go down; the profits collapsed. It just went on and on and on. The Leader of the Opposition was a complete disaster. His policy was a complete failure, and it has been this government’s job to fix it. It cost us political pain, because no-one likes to see their cost of living rise and no-one likes to see electricity prices running up. The opposition, the Labor Party, underestimates the public of Western Australia. The public know the problems that the Labor government left them in a number of areas, including electricity, at the last election. If the Labor Party thinks that the public will vote for it on its record of managing the electricity sector, think again. They do not like us for increasing prices, but they respect us for dealing with the problem in a businesslike and professional way.

**MR A.P. O’GORMAN (Joondalup)** [3.40 pm]: Once again, the Premier, instead of focusing on the issue in front of him, goes on about the carbon tax. Yet today not one cent has been charged for the carbon tax—not one cent has come out of Western Australians’ pockets. Every cent that has gone out of Western Australians’ pockets has gone out because of the Barnett government’s charge on electricity prices. More are doing it tough in WA —

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Do you support the carbon tax? Come on, leprechaun! The leprechaun from Joondalup, do you support it?

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** That was a disgraceful comment from the Premier.

An opposition member interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah!

An opposition member interjected.

**Extract from Hansard**

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**The SPEAKER:** Member for Mandurah, I formally call you to order for the second time today. I was about to say to you that if you wish to make comments, please return to your seat. That was going to be my simple instruction. If you wish to make comments, I direct you to return to your seat.

Premier, I am not aware of what you might have said, but I think I have some indication from you that you will withdraw some comments.

**Mr C.J. BARNETT:** I referred to the member as a leprechaun and I withdraw and apologise.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr A.P. O’GORMAN:** More families —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I want to give you the call, member for Joondalup. Members to my right and left, you had better not stop the member for Joondalup again, otherwise you will be called.

**Mr A.P. O’GORMAN:** We are talking about a number of households. A small article in *The West Australian* last Friday reads —

The number of households needing help to pay their utility bills has more than trebled in the past two years ... Applications to the Government’s hardship utility grants scheme went from 475 in September 2009 to 1638 two years later ...

I have gone to one of my local not-for-profit organisations that provides financial counselling and asked it for some statistics and information on the last four years. These figures concern people in the electorates of Wanneroo, Kingsley and Ocean Reef as well as in my electorate —

- Financial counselling (*which includes payment of bills rent, advocacy etc*) from 148 client in 2007 to 236 clients in 2010 and increase of 59%
- Emergency Relief episodes (*which includes food vouchers, simple bills*) from 912 in 2007 to 1196 in 2010 an increase of 31%
- We have had to refer clients on to other agencies because of lack of appointments on 1091 occasions in 2007 and 2123 in 2010 an increase of 94% —

This is the clincher —

- We started providing food parcels additional to our services in 2007 and these have increased from 130 in 2007 to 1001 in 2010— an increase in 700%—this doesn’t include the free bread that we provide.

As well as providing those additional services, its clients are coming in with more complex needs, as a result of increases in water, power and gas bills put on by this government. The government keeps saying that it is about the carbon tax; it is not. It is about every cent that this government has added to every unit of electricity that every Western Australian in this state buys. If members do not believe us, it is occurring in every single suburb. In Wanneroo, in 2009 the average bill was \$178, in 2011, the average bill was \$258, which is an increase of \$80; Tapping, \$182 in 2009 up to \$254 in 2011, an increase of \$72; Carramar, \$243 up to \$321, an increase of \$78; Darch, \$200 up to \$320, an increase of \$119; Hocking, \$177 up to \$268, an increase of \$91; Madeley, \$186 up to \$293.

Most of those suburbs that I have just read out are brand-new suburbs with young couples doing it tough, and this keeps coming at them all the time from the Barnett government. The government is ripping money out of their pockets instead of leaving it in their pockets so that they can support the retail industry in this state and continue to live good lives in Western Australia. This government has ripped money off them so that it can build monuments to itself such as those up on the hill and down on the waterfront. It is about time that the government realised that it is hurting people out there. Stop it and start helping them.

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot)** [3.45 pm]: I will take this debate seriously, Leader of the Opposition. I will make a couple of points to start with. Looking at the list of the three suburbs in my electorate that the Leader of the Opposition pointed out—Banjup, Leeming and Atwell—I know that the Leader of the Opposition has been to Atwell. About six months ago he wrote to about 3 000 people, through personally addressed mail, to invite them to Labor’s shadow cabinet meeting at the community centre in Atwell. I know about 16 people turned up because four of them were my mates.

Several members interjected.



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**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I know Atwell pretty well. I have lived in Atwell since 2003. I want to make some serious observations about the numbers put by the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition has put into this debate the net increases—he will correct me if I am wrong—in the electricity prices between 2009 and 2011; he is comparing apples with apples.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** An average bill for each suburb in early 2009 compared with early 2011. It is a two-month cycle, but it is the average bill issued across the four-month period.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am crystal-clear about what it is. Obviously, when a utility price goes up by a percentage, the people who will pay more net dollars are the people who are the biggest consumers. I will tell the Leader of the Opposition something about Banjup; most people here would not know where Banjup is, but it is on the eastern side of my electorate.

**Mr C.C. Porter:** Aspirational.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is not even aspirational; I would say that it is a little wealthier than aspirational. About eight houses in Banjup are for sale on the REIWA website. About 465 houses physically exist in Banjup. They are all on five-acre lots. A few of them are for sale. One advertisement is titled “Mansion on 5 acres (2ha)”. This house has five bedrooms, four bathrooms, and a four-car garage. The advertisement reads —

Built in 1998 with Helena Valley bricks and mist green colorbond roof Double door entry hall  
Mansion ...

Do members know the average price of a house in Banjup? This one is selling for more than \$1.5 million. Another one in Banjup is advertised at \$1.49 million and another one at \$1.35 million.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** You should tell your constituents that you think that they can afford the increases.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am saying that we have to keep this in perspective. By keeping it in perspective —

**Dr K.D. Hames** interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I can keep stopping.

By keeping it in perspective, we realise that some of these are massive houses with other costs. Most of them have swimming pools —

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman** interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Does the member mind? Does the member for Joondalup have to be so rude?

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman** interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Shut up for a second.

These are massive houses with pools. The owners have to not only run bore water pumps for the pools, but also absorb other costs from living on these big properties. It is worth noting that the reason the percentage increase has had such a dramatic impact on some of these suburbs is that electricity consumption is greater in these suburbs. If members look at a suburb in Perth, probably closer to the western suburbs where there is a higher density of smaller dwellings, they will see that the net increase would be less because people there probably all live in smaller units that use less electricity.

To keep it totally in perspective, I have always mentioned in this place how much I detest the hypocrisy that goes on in the debate in here. It is worth looking at two issues. The member for Bassendean asked what the government is doing to compensate people for these increases in utility prices. The first thing is that over the last 10 years we have had this bizarre situation in which the taxpayers have been effectively, directly or indirectly, paying tax to subsidise their own electricity bills. What the government has done is exactly what the previous Labor government was going to do—that is, move to more cost reflectivity in electricity pricing. I will read into *Hansard* some of the comments made in the media before the last state election. An article in *The West Australian* of 7 April 2008 by Dawn Gibson reads —

The Government announced on Friday —

That would have been a Friday in April 2008 —

it planned to phase in a gigantic 72 per cent rise in household power bills over six to eight years to reflect the true cost of generating electricity, the same day that Premier Alan Carpenter admitted WA taxpayers faced a \$1 billion-plus bill to bail out cash-strapped electricity generator Verve Energy.

Members opposite talked about compensation. What are we doing? I will tell members what the compensation is from our move towards cost reflectivity on electricity. It is more police. It is more hospital beds. It is better schools. It is more teachers. It is the whole gamut of things and services that the government provides, and that it

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can now provide more of—better roads, better rail, better public transport—because we are not having to spend as many hundreds of millions of dollars subsidising taxpayers’ electricity bills with their own money. It was just a bizarre situation.

I will read out a few more articles. An article dated 17 January 2008 and headed “Water bills to soar in new price plan” reads —

WA households, already bracing for sharp rises in electricity prices, are facing average increases of 50 per cent in water bills over the next six years as the Carpenter Government moves to a new pricing scheme that reflects the true cost of delivering water.

An article in the *Kalgoorlie Miner* of 7 April 2008 reads —

Premier Alan Carpenter said rising fuel prices and the high cost of renewable energy made the increase inevitable.

An article in *The West Australian* of 27 March 2008 by Mark Drummond reads —

Alan Carpenter will soon have some explaining to do.

He will have to tell households why he plans to send their power bills through the roof at a time his Government is raking in \$2 billion-plus annual Budget surpluses during the most buoyant economic times ever experienced in WA.

Then he’ll have to explain how such a situation could possibly have arisen given his Government sold its contentious plan to split up the old Western Power on the premise that doing so would put downward pressure on power prices.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** As it has.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will not go for too much longer. An article in *The Australian* in April 2008 by Paige Taylor reads —

The Carpenter Government claims the price hikes, which include increases of up to 118 per cent for businesses, were “cost reflective” after an 11-year price freeze that contributed to Verve’s woes.

An article in *The Weekend Australian* in April 2008 reads —

Premier Alan Carpenter admitted yesterday the taxpayer bailout would be spread over three years and households would also be slugged with years of price hikes well above the inflation rate to keep the utility afloat.

The point I am making, Leader of the Opposition, is that before the last election, every single person in this place, on the Leader of the Opposition’s side, and on this side, knew that no matter who won government in 2008, electricity prices and utility prices were going to go up. They had to go up.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** So why did the Liberal Party run radio advertisements in the campaign attacking Labor on that basis?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** They had to go up.

**Mr A.J. Waddell** interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** If the member for Forrestfield wants to accuse me of lying, he can stand up and do it by substantive motion in accordance with the standing orders. Okay?

**Mr A.J. Waddell:** I am talking about the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party told lies in the election campaign.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Okay, and I can say that the Labor Party told lies in the election campaign as well. If this is the level of pettiness that this debate has come down to—which party told lies —

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am talking about the principle.

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The carbon tax is a great point that the Premier raised.

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman:** Not one cent has gone onto electricity prices today because of the carbon tax. It is all because of the Barnett government.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I know that it is going to kick in on 1 July next year. But the difference between moving to cost reflectivity on electricity prices, and cutting back the total amount that the government subsidises utility

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prices by, and bringing in a carbon tax, is that every single person knows that a carbon tax will not do anything at all to reduce carbon emissions. It is a socialist tax regime. If the Labor Party wants to tax the rich and give it to the poor, then do it. But do not use climate change as a rubbish excuse to try and bring in a socialist tax regime.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** The point I make here is that members opposite knew damn well that no matter who won the election, utility prices were on a steep curve. That is the honest truth. Members opposite know it; we know it; every single person in Western Australia should know it; and we are going to tell everyone about it. Members opposite were not honest about it. If they were honest about it, they would not have sat on it for eight years without having a single increase in utility prices. So, as the cost of gas went up —

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I was not here. I was too busy being under water, serving my nation.

Several members interjected.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** It is all right for him to go on about it every single time someone criticises him. But I was still paying my utility bills while I was away, and I know they never went up. But the point is that members opposite knew they were going to go up; we knew they were going to go up; everyone knew they were going to go up. For members opposite to sit here and claim that they are holier than thou right now and that it is all our fault is just a rubbish argument. To come in here and pick on suburbs that have the highest demand and the highest consumption rates is just ridiculous. Members opposite are not comparing oranges with oranges or apples with apples. I really think the Leader of the Opposition should go back to the drawing board on this. He is not going to get traction on it.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** I’ve noticed that!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I am trying to put some honesty into the debate here. Every single person knows that the Labor Party was going to do exactly the same thing, if not worse. So, it is a rubbish argument.

In closing, as I have said, I do get a bit frustrated with the hypocrisy of the politics in this place. I really think there are a few people here who should have a good look in the mirror, because they know in their hearts that we are right on this. They should have another look at it; stop trying to con the people of Western Australia; and stop telling Labor lies.

**MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn)** [3.56 pm]: In adding to the debate on this motion, I will say that the only factual thing that the member for Jandakot has just contributed to this debate was his comment about what the Labor Party and the Liberal Party were going to do with electricity prices. He is right. He is quite correct. We as a Labor government were very honest with people in indicating to them what had to happen to electricity prices. He is quite correct about that. We did say before the election in 2008 that the report from the Office of Energy indicated that electricity prices had to go up by 72 per cent; and we did that deliberately, because we wanted to be honest with people about it. What the member for Jandakot seems to have forgotten, along with the Premier, was those Liberal ads that said that prices would be lower under a Liberal government. That is what the member for Jandakot seems to have forgotten and that is what the Premier seems to have forgotten. They were ads on TV, and they misled the people of Western Australia. It is absolutely disgraceful that the Premier of this state can stand in this Parliament and justify a 56 per cent or 57 per cent increase in electricity costs, and completely forget about the promises that the Liberal Party made to the people of Western Australia that allowed him to become the Premier of Western Australia. That is what is disgraceful. What is even more disgraceful is that the member for Jandakot has stood here and has clearly deliberately forgotten, or not mentioned, that Liberal ad.

I will go to some of the things that the member for Jandakot has just said. He said a moment ago, just before he sat down, “I really get disappointed about people who select particular figures.” Well, of the figures that were provided to the opposition—these are figures provided by this government to the opposition—he happens to have selected Banjup, and he then talked about the price increases in Banjup. He clearly slated his own constituents in Banjup, because apparently they are all living in huge mansions with spa baths and swimming pools. I know Banjup very well indeed, as the member for Jandakot knows I know, and that is not the case. The reason they have significant electricity bills is that they are on a five-acre block, because they have pumps, because they have a semi-rural property, and because they have great big sheds. That is the reason they have high electricity bills and they consume a lot. But I will tell members what. The people of Banjup are just as angry as everybody else in this state about the increases to their bills. Just because they live on a rural block and just because their entire block, including the house, might be worth \$1.5 million does not mean to say they are

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really clapping the Liberal government for a 57 per cent increase in electricity costs. If the member thinks they are, he should ask them. Go and ask them!

Let us selectively look at another suburb in the member’s electorate, South Lake, which does not happen to have \$1.5 million houses. It has a lot of Homeswest homes. It has a lot of people struggling and battling to pay their bills. What has happened to them? They have had their electricity bills go up from an average of \$154.27 in 2009 to \$234.50—an \$80.23 average increase in their electricity bills. The battlers of South Lake are paying 52 per cent more for their electricity. I should charge the member for Jandakot for the number of constituents that I service on his behalf. I have said this to him before. He is contracting out his constituents to me to service, because they never go to see him. They all come across the road to see me, because they know that I am available and that I will listen to them—unlike this member here! What do those battlers say? They ask, “How do I get support to pay my electricity bills? How do I get support to pay my water bills?” That is what they ask me. I help them by directing them to the Synergy website for the HUGS payment.

When we look at the number of people who have put out their hand for help with paying their electricity bills, since 2009 we see a fourfold increase in the number of people who cannot pay their electricity bills. A lot of those people are in the constituency of Jandakot. They are the people who live in South Lake. They are the people who live in Atwell. They are the new families who live further south in the suburb of Aubin Grove. They are the people who live in Leeming and who the member for Jandakot thinks have plenty of money to pay their electricity bills. But they do not; they are struggling. They are struggling with electricity price increases. They are struggling with water price increases and with gas price increases, and they are angry. For the member for Jandakot to stand in this house and take the mickey out of people in Banjup for their electricity consumption is a disgrace that will be recorded. It will be recorded in local newspapers and he can explain to his constituents why he did not stand in this house to defend his constituents and why he did not stand in this house to challenge the government about the cost increases that his families—his constituents—face.

**MR C.C. PORTER (Bateman — Treasurer)** [4.02 pm]: This is a very interesting debate. I guess that, much like the member for Cockburn, I came into this place with no particular interest or expertise in the electricity industry. I have had to learn as much as I could in a short period, like many members here—like Hon Peter Collier in the other place and like the Leader of the Opposition. It is an incredibly complicated market. Everyone has a view. But one thing which is absolutely undeniable and which both sides of the house seem to agree on is that the costs of generating electricity over the past decade and the decade to come have been increasing, and they have been increasing rapidly. No one seems to disagree with that. As Treasurer, I met with the heads of the electricity utilities and asked them to explain to me the basis of that; what is contributing to that upward pressure on the cost of generating electricity? I think it was the CEO of Verve Energy who asked me if I wanted the answer in a nutshell. When I said that I did, he replied, “Everything.” All the inputs into electricity generation are increasing—labour, fuel, the manufacturing of electricity power plants—and commonwealth policies require a certain percentage of electricity to be purchased from the least efficient generators, the green generators. All these things contribute to the fast increases in the cost of generating electricity.

The Leader of the Opposition raised my interest when he said that during the period of the previous Labor government, the reason for the price freeze was that it helped households. I know that the Leader of the Opposition is an intelligent person. He cannot honestly believe that to be true. I do not think anyone here accepts that what happened during the last decade helped anyone. I am about to show a graph of residential tariff increases for every state in Australia. The dotted line is the consumer price index and it starts off in —

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Which line?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** The dotted line is CPI—in the middle there.

**Mr R.H. Cook:** We cannot see it.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I will table the document for members, if they like.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Oh, yes; we can just see it.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Indeed; I am sorry, Leader of the Opposition. The bottom line—the black line—is Western Australia, which flatlines from 1997 right up until this government came to office. For the entire period of the Labor government there was no increase in the residential tariff, during a period when the costs of generating electricity were increasing year on year. Every other state government in Australia, all Labor governments at the time, made what must have been the most sensible decision, which was to at least try to gradually increase electricity tariffs along with CPI. The point is that if we hold tariffs still, if we freeze them during a period in which the costs of generating electricity are increasing —

**Mr M.P. Whitely** interjected.

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**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** The member for Bassendean says that it is Labor-stated policy to freeze electricity prices again and he bemoans the level of debt. But if Labor was to freeze electricity prices now, it would add a massive amount of money to net debt overnight with the stroke of a pen.

**Mr M.P. Whitely** interjected.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** It would add about \$1.9 billion to net debt with the stroke of a pen. But nobody can seriously think that freezing electricity prices over the last decade was good for households.

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** It was good for households.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** It could not have been. It could not have been good for households.

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** It is good for households if they do not have to pay so much, and if debt is under control, that is evidence of good economic management. You fail on both counts. You are putting up fees and charges, and debt is blowing out of the world.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** That is absolutely astonishing.

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** That is the bottom line and people understand it.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, member for Bassendean!

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** I think that people understand that there had to be some increase in electricity prices. When Labor was in government it said that, and in response to —

**Mr M.P. Whitely** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, I presume there will be an opportunity for you to stand to talk to this MPI. I ask you to stop interjecting, and I formally call you to order for the first time today.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** In response to that flat black line, which no other state in Australia determined was a good idea, the member for Cockburn, when he was the Minister for Energy—it must have been a tough day; we have been through a few ourselves—had to announce a 10 per cent increase in electricity for seven years, if Labor were elected. That would have meant, in 2008–09, a 10 per cent increase in the price of electricity; in 2009–10, 10 per cent; 2010–11, 10 per cent; 2012–13, 10 per cent; 2013–14, 10 per cent; 2014–15, 10 per cent; and 2015–16, 10 per cent. Labor’s assumption, on the evidence it had, was that it would bring the tariff close to the costs of generating electricity. In actual fact, had Labor been elected, the price increase for this very year would have been double what it is under this government.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** That is not the case.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** No; it is. Labor predicted a 10 per cent increase in 2012–13 and said that the increase would be 10 per cent in 2011–12, and we have a five per cent increase this year and five per cent is the increase the people of Western Australia will pay next year.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** You know that is a dishonest argument.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** No; it is not a dishonest argument. All we are arguing about is whether Labor front-loaded the increases, back-loaded the increases or smoothed the increases. That is the only thing that we are arguing about. It is true, and the former Minister for Energy knows it is true, that in 2008–09, Labor proposed a 10 per cent increase, as did the Liberal Party. In 2009–10, Labor’s increase would have been 10 per cent; ours was 25. That was the year that we decided to take the most pain on this problem. In 2010–11, Labor proposed 10 per cent; we were 10 per cent. In 2012–13, Labor proposed 10 per cent; we have increased the tariff by five per cent. In 2013–14, Labor proposed a 10 per cent increase; and we will be five. In the final two years of that seven-year cycle, 2014–15 and 2015–16, Labor proposed 10 per cent and 10 per cent. At the moment, the estimates show, for this government, 12 per cent and 12 per cent. I suggest that one thing that we can guarantee about those estimates is that the increase will not be 12 and 12. I can suggest that. In actual fact, if we look at 70 per cent spread over seven years at 10 per cent, all we are arguing about is front loading versus smoothing. That is it. What is remarkable, and I take the point —

**Mr P. Papalia:** No; we are talking about people!

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** People whom Labor would have charged 10 per cent increases each year for seven years.

**Mr P. Papalia:** You’re the one who is hurting.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, member for Warnbro!

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 8 November 2011]

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Speaker; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Tony O’Gorman; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Janet Woollard

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**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Seventy per cent! And when we look at the final four years of this budget cycle, whatever those increases are, the figures for both sides will be about the same, because the people who advised the former Labor government are the people who are advising this government, and they say that we cannot, ever again, in this state freeze the residential tariff for electricity.

**Mr F.M. Logan:** Can I just say one thing, then, Attorney General?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Yes.

**Mr F.M. Logan:** There was only one price increase since 1993.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Indeed, and it may have been this. I have indicated that it may be a good idea to move an amendment.

*Amendment to Motion*

**MR C.C. PORTER:** I move —

To delete all words after “house”, and substitute —

recognises that the botched disaggregation of Western Power by the former Labor government —

- (a) created four corporations, each with a board, resulting in board sitting fees increasing from \$393 500 in 2006 to \$1.517 million, an increase of \$1.124 million, or 285 per cent;
- (b) led to executive salaries increasing dramatically from \$1.87 million in 2006 to \$10.5 million in 2009, an increase of 463 per cent;
- (c) led to the number of full-time equivalent staff increasing from 2 919 in 2006 to 4 041 in 2009, an increase of 1 122 staff, or 38 per cent; and
- (d) did not lead to cheaper energy in Western Australia as promised, and was a catastrophic failure to the expense of Western Australian household budgets.

In addition, the house does not support the federal government’s recently passed carbon tax legislation.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I thank members to my left for providing the advice that my single voice could have achieved. Treasurer, I will need to be provided with a copy of that proposed amendment before I can make any decision at all.

*Ruling by Speaker*

**The SPEAKER:** Treasurer, in the context of the matter of public interest that has been presented to this house, I make the ruling that that is an entirely new proposition. I am going to rule that proposed amendment out of order, and am going to put to the house that the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition be agreed to.

*Matter of Public Interest Resumed*

**MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta)** [4.12 pm]: Labor Party members on this side of the house have personal experience of the real hardship and suffering that people have been put under by the Barnett government’s 57 per cent increase in electricity prices over just three years. We know that this government has simply upped electricity and water prices to pay for its profligate spending. Its expenditure has increased by 32 per cent over its first three budgets, and that is why it is hitting people. It is not because of all the other reasons and excuses that the government has tried to put out. I put it to the house that the Premier’s contribution to the debate today very much reminded me of the behaviour of Kenrick Monk. People who do not follow swimming perhaps would not remember Kenrick Monk; he is one of our better swimmers, and a very good member of our relay team in freestyle. He realised, during training leading up to major events and the Olympics, that he should not have gone out there and undertaken dangerous sports, but he did; he went skateboarding, fell off his skateboard, and broke his arm, obviously jeopardising both his career and those of the elite Australian swimmers on the Olympic relay team. So what did he do? He borrowed from the Premier’s book and made up a cock-and-bull story! He actually said that it was a hit-and-run incident! He did not fall off his skateboard; no, it was a hit-and-run incident that broke his arm.

This Premier does that all the time. We know the pain that his increases in electricity and water prices have inflicted, and all because he cannot control spending. There is no other reason. Do not worry about the

**Extract from Hansard**

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Treasurer's fancy numbers; the issue is a 57 per cent increase in electricity charges over three years and a 32 per cent increase in this government's recurrent expenditure over just three years. That is why it is taxing ordinary households and increasing charges, particularly the 57 per cent increase in electricity charges. What does the Premier do to justify that? He comes in here and says a whole lot of things that are either irrelevant or untrue. We did not hear him utter a single word of sympathy for the pain that he is causing ordinary households—pensioners who are battling and self-funded retirees who are having all this extra impost put on them by the Barnett Liberal government.

**Mr C.J. Barnett:** Do you support the carbon tax?

**Mr J.C. KOBELKE:** I thank the Premier for his interjection. He wants to talk about the carbon tax which has not even come in yet, but which will provide a whole lot of support to people to actually ameliorate any ill effects. On the other hand, this Premier has had his hand in the pockets of pensioners, taking the money out to pay for his palace across the road, for all the extra government offices and for all the singing toilets and plastic cows. They are higher priorities for this Premier than the people of Western Australia who are battling to make ends meet. The people are doing it tough because this Premier whacks them time after time after time, and then he comes in here and does a Kenrick Monk: he makes up a story that has little or no truth to it, because he cannot handle the truth. He cannot handle the fact that his decisions are hurting the people out there. Labor Party members know it; we share their pain and we want to stand up for them. Liberal Party members opposite will not even stand and speak on behalf of their constituents. They do not represent their constituents; they are simply toadying to this Premier—this Kenrick Monk!

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Victoria Park, I formally call you to order for the third time today, along with the member for Mandurah. Member for Nollamara, I call you to order for the first time today.

**DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove)** [4.17 pm]: I can appreciate that many people across the metropolitan area are very concerned that there has been an increase in electricity prices. However, that increase in electricity prices has come about because, for many years, people have had their electricity subsidised. I would hope that —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I hope you appreciate that I am trying to get this matter of public interest in front of the house. Member for Pilbara, I formally call you to order for the third time today. I suggest to members that they might like to read the standing orders and be a little more aware of what happens in this place on a minute-by-minute basis.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** As I was saying —

*Point of Order*

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Mr Speaker, I am interested in your ruling. Ordinarily, matters of public interest are guided by standing order 145, which indicates that there can be a debate for an hour and five minutes. I think that standing order assumes that Independent members may have five minutes in total. I seek your ruling in relation to the member for Alfred Cove because it is my belief that she is not independent and is not an Independent member. She is a part of the government, and, therefore, that five minutes should not go to a member who is a part of the government.

*Ruling by Speaker*

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Rockingham, it is an issue that I will pursue because you have asked it. My ruling at this point is that the member for Alfred Cove is an Independent member in this place and I am going to go with the standing orders that provide her with five minutes, and then I will put to the house the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Member for Rockingham, as you know from previous occasions, I am more than willing to look at this question that you have provided. My ruling at this stage is that she is an Independent member.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very pleased to stand here as an Independent to discuss this issue.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** There are people —

Speaker; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Tony O’Gorman; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Janet Woollard

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**Mr P.B. Watson** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Albany!

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Sorry; Mr Speaker, I ask for a point of order as well. Just last week the Minister for Health withdrew, on your request, exactly the same allegation that the member for Joondalup has just made about the member for Alfred Cove. I suggest —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** In the interest of consistency, I suggest that the member for Joondalup also be asked to withdraw the comment of calling the member a puppet.

**The SPEAKER:** I am not aware of what the member for Joondalup might have said.

*Debate Resumed*

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I am very pleased to be able to join in this debate because many people in the community are having difficulties because of the increase in electricity bills, but the figures that the Treasurer put to the house today show that there was a guaranteed 70 per cent increase by 2015–16 from the previous government, and with the current Liberal–National government, there is not that guarantee.

**Mr P.B. Watson** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Albany!

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** Its figures are 10 per cent in 2008–09, 25 per cent in 2009–10, 10 per cent in 2010–11, five per cent in 2011–12, five per cent in 2013–14, and the Treasurer has said that, although initially the government thought it might be 12 per cent for 2014–15 and 2015–16, that is not guaranteed, and it might be less than that; it could be only eight per cent. That means that the price rises will not be as high as they would have been under the previous government.

**Mr A.J. Waddell** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Forrestfield!

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I would hope that both sides of this house would look at the people who are having problems with these bills and that the government will give some kind of assistance to people in recognised need.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Victoria Park!

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** The people who can pay these increases should be paying for the true value of electricity, but some people are struggling. I hope that the government will look at those people who are struggling and give them assistance. Bearing that in mind and having had a commitment from —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, members! I presume some of you want to vote. There are two minutes left; I want to hear it in silence.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I am very pleased that the Treasurer has given a commitment that those people who are in genuine need because of these increases in prices will be considered on an individual basis and given support when support is needed. That being the case —

**Mr A.J. Waddell** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Forrestfield, I formally call you to order for the first time today—remarkable.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** That being the case, I would like to delete all the words after “house” and substitute “recognises that increases in electricity prices are a direct result of the —

Several members interjected.

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I know; I need to get stronger glasses!

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Albany, I formally call you to order for the second time today.



Speaker; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Tony O’Gorman; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Fran Logan; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Janet Woollard

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*Amendment to Motion*

**Dr J.M. WOOLLARD:** I move —

To delete all the words after “house”, and substitute —

recognises that increases in electricity prices are a direct result of the botched disaggregation of Western Power by the previous Labor government.

*Point of Order*

**Mr E.S. RIPPER:** What is the convention of the house when it comes to the moving of amendments that provide absolutely no possibility for any response because of the interaction of the standing orders? An amendment has been moved and there will be no chance to debate it or to respond to it because it has been moved at the very last minute in the debate. Is that in accordance with the spirit of the rules?

*Ruling by Speaker*

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, I would not necessarily think it was within the spirit of debate. It is my opportunity at this particular point to decide whether to accept the amendment or not, and I am going to have a look at that, Leader of the Opposition.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr M.P. Whitely** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean, I formally call you to order for the second time today. Some members in this place might not appreciate that occasionally I endeavour to look after their interests. That is the only comment I will make on that.

With respect to the question that you have asked, Leader of the Opposition, and this particular amendment that has been proposed, I once again make the decision that the original motion as put by the Leader of the Opposition stands in this house.

*Matter of Public Interest Resumed*

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (25)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr F.M. Logan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr P.B. Watson
Ms A.S. Carles	Mr M. McGowan	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr R.H. Cook	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr T.G. Stephens	Mr D.A. Templeman ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr A.P. O’Gorman	Mr C.J. Tallentire	
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr P. Papalia	Mr P.C. Tinley	
Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr A.J. Waddell	

Noes (29)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr V.A. Catania	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr F.A. Alban	Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr W.R. Marmion	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr A.J. Simpson ( <i>Teller</i> )
Mr I.M. Britza	Dr K.D. Hames	Ms A.R. Mitchell	
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Dr M.D. Nahan	
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr C.C. Porter	

Pairs

Dr A.D. Buti	Dr E. Constable
Ms R. Saffioti	Dr G.G. Jacobs

Question thus negatived.