

STATE BUDGET 2011–12 — NEEDS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

Matter of Public Interest

THE SPEAKER (Mr G.A. Woodhams): Members, today I 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 this House calls on the Government to bring down a budget tomorrow that will meet the real needs of people in Western Australia.”

The matter appears to me to be in order and if at least five people will stand in support of this matter being discussed—I note that there are—the matter can proceed.

[At least five members rose in their places.]

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont — Leader of the Opposition) [2.55 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the government to bring down a budget tomorrow that will meet the real needs of people in Western Australia.

I move this motion because I have seen reference in the media to Premier’s comments that somehow tomorrow’s budget will be the people’s budget. I thought it might be useful to lay down a few things that the budget needs to do if it is really going to meet the needs of people in Western Australia.

The first thing the budget needs to do is to put a freeze on utility price increases in Western Australia. We have had a 46 per cent increase in electricity prices. We have had a 30 per cent increase in water prices. It is not affecting only pensioners, but they are important; it is not affecting only people on fixed incomes and Centrelink benefits; it is starting to make life really difficult for working families in Western Australia. We have families in which both adults are working saying to us and to welfare agencies that they are struggling to make ends meet; that they are finding it really difficult to pay their utility bills.

What we have from the Treasurer and from the Premier is arrogant management—speak about the need for cost-reflective tariffs. I think the people of Western Australia would be amazed to learn that what the government is talking about is not the cost of fuel or the cost of labour or the cost of a transformer. When the government defines a cost-reflective tariff, it defines as part of the cost its dividend; its income-tax equivalent payment—the cost of the tariff equalisation fund to provide the uniform tariff across Western Australia. What we have here is a definition of cost-reflectivity that the public simply would not accept. When we make the calculations of the money going into electricity utilities and Treasury and all the money going out of the electricity utilities to Treasury, we find that there is a net return to the Treasury of Western Australia. What the government is talking about is its income—its revenue. The government is slugging Western Australian families to have a de facto, sneaky tax in order to get the revenue that it needs.

We have the Treasurer crying poor and talking debt. The Treasurer says, “Okay, the opposition wants us to freeze electricity prices. This is the debt impact.” People listening to that analysis might think this is money that has to be given to the electricity utilities in order to make up for their losses. It is revenue forgone. It is a debt impact because the government is not able to rake in as much revenue as it would like to rake in from the electricity utilities and the water corporation.

I completely dismiss that argument. It is about the government not wanting to give up the revenue that it is raking in from ordinary Western Australian families. I say this to the government: if it is genuinely to be a people’s budget, not only should the government freeze utility costs, but it should also give up what it has done in previous budgets—that is, it should give up sneaky new charges outside the utility cost system. In one budget we had a black hole in the Department of Environment and Conservation created by the government creating funds. That budget black hole was filled by a big increase in the waste levy, which then appeared on local government rates bill.

In last year’s budget we had the government withdrawing money from fire and emergency services, creating a budget black hole and reducing its contribution. How was that budget black hole filled? It was filled with a significant, out-of-the-ordinary increase in the emergency services levy. Once again, that appears on people’s local government rates bills. If it is going to be a people’s budget, one, the government should freeze its own increases in utility costs, and two, it should not have any sneaky new taxes like the waste levy or like the emergency services levy increase last year.

People are doing it tough, and that is shown in the reports that we are getting from welfare organisations. For example, residential gas disconnections have increased by 29.8 per cent to 16 805. That is one piece of evidence.

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Another piece of evidence comes from a newspaper report of the comments of a representative of WestAus Crisis and Welfare Services based in Mandurah, which states that demand for their services is up 15 per cent. The St Vincent de Paul Society has put out a press release saying that demand for its services has risen by 55 per cent. Anglicare, which is another welfare agency, surveyed 2 600 rental advertisements to check the position of housing affordability. Of those 2 600 rental advertisements, only 12 were affordable and suitable for people on pensions and benefits. Only one half of one per cent of the rental advertisements surveyed were appropriate and affordable for people on pensions and benefits—that is using standard rules. In today's two-speed economy and with the government's savage increases in utility prices, there is a big increase in demand for welfare services. This big increase in demand is hitting the non-government welfare sector that is already buckling. That non-government welfare sector is already buckling because of a 30 per cent gap between the wages paid in the public sector and the wages paid for equivalent positions in the NGO sector. This is a serious problem which threatens to cause the collapse of the NGO welfare sector. What does that sector say it needs? In its pre-budget submission the Western Australian Council of Social Service says that to fix this problem and to deal with regional issues, where costs are very high, it needs \$223 million a year, which is \$900 million across the forward estimates period. That is the test for this government. If this government is going to do something to assist non-government welfare organisations, the test is how close it goes to providing that \$900 million over four years that the non-government welfare organisations need, just so they can do what it is they are doing in the face of labour shortages and this huge wages gap.

I think the government is going to make a virtue out of a necessity, courtesy of Labor's industrial relations reforms and the creation of Fair Work Australia. We are going to have a Fair Work Australia ruling on the pay disparity between public sector pay and non-government welfare organisations' pay. It is a matter of gender equality and gender discrimination because so many workers in the non-government sector are women. That ruling will come down from Fair Work Australia. Once it comes down, non-government welfare organisations will have to make those payments. At that stage, the non-government welfare sector may well face collapse unless governments, federal and state, increase their funding. The welfare sector says it needs \$900 million over four years to deal with that issue. The government is going to give some money to the non-government welfare sector tomorrow, and it is going to boast about it and call it a people's budget. But it is a necessity, because if the government does not give this money to the non-government sector following the Fair Work Australia ruling to pay fair wages to the sector's workers, the non-government welfare sector will collapse. The non-government welfare sector needs money beyond that, simply to meet the increased demand that I have been talking about. I will remind members of the figures: a 55 per cent increase in demand for services from the St Vincent de Paul Society and a 15 per cent increase in demand for the services of WestAus Crisis and Welfare Services, the agency that I referred to in Mandurah. However, there is a third element that is going to hit the non-government welfare sector; that is, the government has plans to send a lot of additional work from the public sector out to the non-government organisations. There are three things putting pressure on the non-government organisations: the wage disparity; the increase in demand as a result of the government's savage increases to utility prices; and the increased work as a result of the government's plan to privatise services currently offered in the public sector. The government's commitment to non-government organisations will have to be measured against the background of those three big pressures on the non-government sector. I remind members that the sector says it needs \$900 million over four years just to pay fair wages and to respond to the Fair Work Australia ruling that is likely to come down, just to keep doing what they are doing.

In order for this to be a people's budget there are other things that the government needs to do, and I will talk about those at length. The government needs to order 30 new rail carriages immediately. The government needs to order new buses; we are only paying for replacement buses at the moment. We need new buses to expand public transport services. The government needs to invest significantly in roads. The government has under-invested in roads. Anywhere that we go in the Perth metropolitan area, we are likely to find a random traffic jam at three o'clock on a weekday afternoon because this government has been underspending on roads and blaming the federal government to disguise its own failure. The government has to spend on water security. The government has to be able to provide adequate water supplies next summer and the following summer. The government has to do that in the budget, not outside the budget where it can keep those figures out of the debt figures.

Finally, this budget should provide sufficient funding for our hospitals so that the government does not have to engage in cost-cutting exercises and privatising out to organisations like Serco key services in our public hospitals and public schools. Those are just some of the things that the government needs to do to genuinely call tomorrow's budget a people's budget. Let me remind members what the government should do: freeze increases in utility costs; give the non-government welfare sector enough to meet those three huge pressures that it is facing, including the huge pressure caused by wage disparity; and fund the essential, core infrastructure that our

people need for the services they expect from government and for the economic growth that this state is going to have.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [3.07 pm]: This is supposed to be a debate. It is called a matter of public interest debate. We have a gutless government that will not respond to the Leader of the Opposition. This government does not want me to be able to rebut the points that it makes during this debate. We are not having a matter of public interest debate. The government is having a little set piece from each side of the house. Kids at school can do better than this! The Premier is a disgrace. He should have responded to the Leader of the Opposition. The Treasurer is not even in this chamber; he is not here to respond. How can this be a debate if members opposite will not get up and debate? This is a set piece! In a debate, one person speaks and someone from the other side speaks, and then someone from this side speaks again. We have seen this in a number of MPIs in recent times in which this gutless government will not debate members on this side, particularly on financial issues, because it is clearly not up to a debate. Government members are not up to a debate; they are only up to a set piece. We have a Premier who will not respond to the Leader of the Opposition, which will not allow me to then come in as the next speaker and debate him.

We have a Premier who is, as we know, completely out of touch with ordinary people. We have a Premier who thinks that householders do not need air conditioning and who thought that schools in this state did not need air conditioning either. We have a Premier who, when he had the opportunity through the Building the Education Revolution program and federal money to install air conditioning, said that schools were not allowed to put in air conditioning as part of that program, because under the rules it had not been allowed in this state. That was a golden opportunity to put in place that infrastructure in our schools. The government prevented that from happening even though the federal government was prepared to pay for it. That is how out of touch this government is. The Premier represents Cottesloe. He does not represent people who do not live in beachside areas and who do not get the benefit of the Fremantle doctor at all, let alone until much later in the day. Only someone who lives in a beachside suburb would say that people in Western Australia do not need air conditioning. This is the same Premier who said last week that first home buyers should lower their expectations when buying their first home. Guess what, Mr Premier? The people have already lowered their expectations. Even with their lower expectations they cannot get into the housing market. That is the reality. They cannot save the deposit, they are facing high rents and houses cost more than they did when the Premier bought his first home.

While the Premier tells my constituents and the people of Western Australia to lower their expectations for first home ownership and tells them that maybe they cannot afford to buy a home and maybe they will have to live in a tent—I do not know—and while he is telling them that they do not need air conditioning, he is busy building his Premier's palace down the road. That is his priority. He talks the talk when it comes to the payment of Michele Dolin from GESB or various other people from time to time when it is revealed how much they are earning. He says, "Oh, their pay has gone up by another \$100 000 a year." He tut-tuts and says, "I don't think that's right. I'm a bit shocked about that and will do something about it." Guess what? He never does anything about it. He never punishes those people. Yesterday we saw that Michele Dolin was to receive a payout that is, at least in part, based on her salary. The extra \$100 000 to her salary was given to her by the government just a couple of years ago. The government gave her the extra salary and now, after eight years, she has walked away with three-quarters of a million dollars. That is unbelievable. The Premier said last night on telly that he was a bit shocked about it, but what will he do about it? He will not do anything because he is too busy raking money from ordinary people from ordinary households. So far we have seen from the government budgets that have shown no compassion for ordinary householders and certainly no compassion for families that are struggling on modest incomes. The government took away the It Pays to Learn allowance, the \$100 relief for schools, and the community service obligation for the senior school students. It was not just a matter of removing the requirement on students having to do 20 hours of community service otherwise they would not graduate because people did not like it; the government took away the money that went with that program. That is the kind of mean-spirited out-of-touch government we have had in this state over the past couple of years.

When I think of what the state government should provide in the budget and who the state government should provide for, I think of the ordinary families in Western Australia—people on modest incomes, pensioners and self-funded retirees. They are not in a position to earn big bucks as a result of the mining boom. This government will be judged on how its budget affects those people. What we have seen so far in this government's first two budgets has not been good at all. So far we have seen the government punish people through the bills which they pay for their basic needs and from which they cannot get away. When people are asked what kinds of services they expect the state government to provide, the two most basic needs they expect to be provided are water and power. Yes, the government has to provide a police service, a good health service, a good education for students and a good public transport system, but first and foremost everyone must flick on the light switch for electricity

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and turn on the tap to get water. They are the really basic needs of every household, yet essentially the government is using the charges for these needs as a tax on every household. It is a blunt instrument because people need to use the same amount of water regardless of whether they live in a rich or a poor household. People need to shower, wash their clothes and do the basic things in life. The percentage of income spent on a poor family's household water and electricity bill is much higher than it is for people in the higher income brackets. The percentage of the total income of a pensioner, for example, that goes towards paying those basic bills is phenomenal. There is a 10 per cent differential between households with an income of \$20 000 and households with an income of \$200 000 because the lower income earner earns only 10 per cent of the income of the higher income earner.

Power and water are basic needs. The opposition understands that it costs money to provide those services. It costs money to generate power and harvest water and to convey that power and water to households and businesses. As a community, we accept that we have to pay towards the cost of those utilities. For the most part we accept that it is best practice, where possible, for the money that is recovered from the use of these utilities to be used to cover the cost of the provision of those services. The principle of user pays is reasonable and fair, but only if two factors are taken into consideration. The first is that the price of the utilities must be affordable for those on low and fixed incomes, and the second is that the provision of those utilities should not be used as a device for the government to raise revenue. The reason for these two factors is simple: it is a matter of fairness because, as I have explained already, the demand on each household is very similar regardless of whether a person is rich or poor. It is much harder on the poorest people—the pensioners, those on fixed incomes and the families who are struggling on modest incomes to send their kids to school. Over the past two years we have seen a 46 per cent increase in the cost of power and a 30 per cent increase in the cost of water. The Treasurer tells us that tomorrow's rises will be more modest. They would want to be, because even if the next rise is just five or seven per cent, it will represent a more than 50 per cent rise in the cost of power in just three budgets under the Barnett government.

We have moved this motion today to call on the government to produce a budget that meets the needs of ordinary Western Australians. To meet the needs of ordinary Western Australians, we need to cover some pretty basic things. The budget will be judged on those basic issues. People will look at the cost of their household bills and determine what empathy there is from this government for the increased water, electricity and gas charges. They will also contemplate how these charges have driven up other costs. The increased cost of electricity and water has increased the cost of businesses and those costs are also passed on to householders. The cost of local government has also gone up as a result because local governments are paying more for electricity, which has an escalating effect. We have seen significant increases in the Fire and Emergency Services Authority levy under this government. That too will be added on to people's council rate notices. We will look to see whether this budget provides any relief to families and pensioners who are struggling with their household bills. We will ask whether the budget provides a better public transport system, a better education system or better health care. Will our streets be safer and our roads less perilous? They are the things that the Western Australian community will be looking for in this budget. The first two budgets of this government have failed. We have seen utility prices go up but we have not seen a better education or health system or safer roads and streets. In fact, we have seen the reverse. We have seen an outbreak of violence on our streets and an escalation in crime. Will this budget meet the real needs of Western Australians? I hope so. However, for it to meet those real needs, it will need to be a very different budget from the government's first two budgets.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [3.19 pm]: I want to make a few comments on this motion. The motion does not say anything about ordinary Western Australians. I do not think there is such a thing as an ordinary Western Australian. The motion states —

That this house calls on the government to bring down a budget tomorrow that will meet the real needs of people in Western Australia.

And we will. We agree with the motion. We will not meet every need—we cannot solve every problem—but it will be a budget that addresses the needs of those most in need. That is what we will do tomorrow. I will not foreshadow what the Treasurer will present in tomorrow's budget. We can wait one more sleep for that. But I will comment on some of the statements made by members opposite, and then some of my members on this side will comment on the things we have announced. We have foreshadowed some elements of the budget. We have foreshadowed that 100 per cent of speeding and red-light camera fines will go into road safety. That is something that the previous Labor government talked about but did not do. That will apply in two stages, starting on 1 July. We have also increased funding for the RSPCA. This government has a commitment to animal welfare, and another member will talk about that. There will be more to follow from what was announced on the weekend. We have also provided funding for Lifeline, which the Labor government did not do. So members opposite should not come into this place in a self-righteous way and talk about ordinary Western Australians.

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Tomorrow's budget will be judged on its merits, as it should be. The Leader of the Opposition talked about electricity. There has been a lot of ill-informed discussion about electricity in this house. People have said that the Liberal Party voted for the freeze and all the rest of it. It is true. From 1992 until recently, there was a long period in which there was no increase in prices for the common small business tariff. Throughout the 1990s, there was only one year in which the household rate went up by 3.75 per cent, and that was in 1997. What is interesting is that, during that period in the 1990s, the then Western Power continued to operate, provided supply, built power stations and retained profitability, yet prices did not go up. How was that achieved? It was achieved by one simple measure: real gains in efficiency were made within the electricity industry.

Mr M.P. Murray: Lower coal prices.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The price —

Mr M.P. Murray: Go on; admit it.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The price of electricity did not rise except in one year during the 1990s because efficiencies were made right across the sector. Prices can be frozen if real savings are made.

Mr E.S. Ripper: You didn't invest in the electricity network, and you're doing it again.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am going to sit down, Mr Acting Speaker. I listened in silence to the two members opposite. During the 1990s when there was an effective price freeze in the cost of electricity, it was because real efficiencies were made. There was nothing magical or tricky.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Just underinvestment.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Real savings were made. That is an ill-informed comment about underinvestment. Which government built the coal-fired power station in Collie? This government —

Mr E.S. Ripper: You underinvested in the network.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There are all the excuses in the world. When the Labor Party came to power, it tried to cop —

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I will sit down, Mr Acting Speaker, and that will be the end of the debate if that is what members opposite want.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Members!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: There were zero price rises —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Mr M.P. Murray: The shire is still waiting for you.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: What a joke this is!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, I call you to order for the first time!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: During the 1990s, there were effective price freezes, with one exception, because real efficiencies were being made. When the Labor Party came to power, it thought it could do the same thing, so it had a freeze in prices but it did not make the efficiency gains. In fact, it added to the cost of the system with the failed break-up of Western Power. It ignored opportunities —

Mr E.S. Ripper: Why don't you reverse it?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Mr Acting Speaker, I will sit down. This is not serious if members opposite will not listen to any response.

Mr E.S. Ripper: Take an interjection.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you have had your say. Let the Premier have his say.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Labor Party ignored opportunities to repurchase gas at lower prices. It ignored opportunities to rebook space on the pipeline. There was failed decision after failed decision. It set up a structure of four utilities that has made the whole energy sector remarkably precarious. The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing. That is the legacy. The Labor Party froze prices when fuel prices were rising. It had not booked to buy the extra gas when it could buy it, it did not roll over contracts, and then it got in the position of

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importing diesel fuel to run gas-fired power plants when oil prices were at world record highs. No wonder when we came to government we had the legacy of a debt totalling nearly \$4 billion for those four utilities. That is the reason that this government had no option but to increase prices. Do members think I liked increasing the prices for what members have described as ordinary Western Australians? No, I did not, but this government had the conviction and the courage to deal with the issue. The Labor Party tried to conceal it, and in the comments made by members opposite today they have tried to conceal it again.

I will move on because other members want to speak. Members opposite talked about the community sector. Yes, the community sector is under a lot of pressure. Which government had a dialogue and has a dialogue and a relationship with the community sector? It is this government through the community partnership forum, which has been meeting since June last year. I meet with those people regularly. I also meet with the heads of churches. Out of that, some announcements will be made by the Treasurer in tomorrow's budget, and members opposite can judge those at the time.

Members opposite talked about hospitals. Look at the program of capital works that the Minister for Health is overseeing at the moment. Yes, the Labor Party did the planning for Fiona Stanley Hospital, but did it lay a brick? No, it did not. Construction is about to start on the children's hospital and on Albany, Kalgoorlie and Busselton hospitals. No government in this state's history has had a commitment to public health equal to this government's commitment. There is the patient assisted travel scheme and the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia and on and on it goes. Members should look tomorrow at our commitment to health and to the people of Western Australia—the people members opposite dismiss as ordinary Western Australians. Let us look at what the Deputy Premier and health minister will deliver for the health system tomorrow. I hope members opposite have the courage and the honesty to praise what he has done.

Mr E.S. Ripper: We will not praise privatisation.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Members will not praise privatisation. Move on a little! The nurses and doctors will be government employees and the hospital will be built and owned by the government. This will be a public hospital, publicly funded and publicly staffed. Members opposite can continue to talk about privatisation. During question time, the Leader of the Opposition asked about the Government Employees Superannuation Board. The Labor Party's mutualisation plan was for the effective privatisation of the superannuation fund of public servants. The hypocrisy from the Leader of the Opposition is overwhelming!

Members opposite carry on about education. What has been the most fundamental reform in education in the past 20 years? The most fundamental reform has been the establishment of independent public schools by the Minister for Education. Nearly 200 schools want to become independent public schools. Do members opposite support independent public schools or not? They have no idea whether they support them. They do not know what their policy position is. We will stand on our budget for health, community services, education and the environment. Yes, there will be some increases in utility charges, but they will be as modest as we can keep them. We will not be irresponsible. We will not pretend to members of the public of Western Australia that they can have something for free. People like to hear members say that it can all be free, that Barnett is nasty and whatever else, but the public of Western Australia know when someone is telling the truth. I talk to thousands of people all the time.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We will see. Members opposite keep talking about the mining boom, and I keep on telling them that this state is not in a boom. They might look at some of the national statistics coming out now for the retail, property, tourism and other sectors and realise that the Australian economy is struggling. It is very true. People who work in the mining industry or in the construction sector in the mining industry are probably getting very high incomes of \$150 000 or \$200 000 a year, but not everyone works in that industry. People who do not work in that industry are doing it tough. We on this side of the house understand that people are struggling; they are doing it tough. But we will not lie to them. We will not mislead them about the cost of providing essential services. Why? Because we respect them. We do not describe them as "ordinary Western Australians". We respect them, we trust them, and we will be honest. Tomorrow's budget will not please everyone but it will do as the opposition's motion suggests—it will not meet every need but it will meet the real needs of those Western Australians who are most in need. It might surprise members opposite to hear we will support the motion. We will demonstrate it tomorrow in the Treasurer's budget.

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot) [3.30 pm]: There is something excruciatingly painful about listening to an opposition so desperate for relevance. It is a bit like a fish out of water, jumping along the wharf trying desperately to get back in the water, but slowly dying. There is nothing much that can be done. I do not even need to see a Westpoll or a Newspoll to know how irrelevant the opposition is at the moment. I can just look at —

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Mr E.S. Ripper: Five thousand people outside Parliament House!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I can look at the 5 000 personally addressed letters the Leader of the Opposition sent to constituents in my electorate asking them to come to his shadow community cabinet. If the Premier sent 5 000 letters out to constituents in his electorate asking people to come to meet five ministers, what kind of turnout would he get? Give me a number.

Mr C.J. Barnett: If I said we were going to have high-rise buildings in Cottesloe, I would get 20 000 probably!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Does anyone want to guess how many people turned up out of the 5 000 personally addressed letters?

Mr C.J. Barnett: How many came?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Seventeen—four of whom were my mates! Thirteen people turned up when the Leader of the Opposition sent out 5 000 letters. I do not need a Newspann to tell me that you guys are irrelevant!

Mr D.A. Templeman: You better be careful what you say because it will be reported.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Absolutely; 13 people out of 5 000 letters. Good effort!

Mr D.A. Templeman: You're an arrogant fool; that's what you are, son. I will tell you what—these words will come back to haunt you. You are pumping yourself up. You started off like a big puffed-up blowfish!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: We will do a little swapsy like Eric the blue balloon!

Obviously I am not privy to what is in the budget, but there are some announcements that have been made, as the Premier alluded to. I am very proud of the government increasing funding for an organisation I have been a life member of for 18 years; that is, the RSPCA. It is a great organisation.

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I am happy to get to that point.

The RSPCA is obviously renowned for its work to promote kindness to animals and prevent cruelty to animals, whether large or small, as its logo says. It is the organisation that is most valued for its volunteer base. It has served the WA community for 115 years. The RSPCA relies heavily on public support. That could be seen last Sunday at the Million Paws Walk. People talk about thousands of people campaigning outside the steps of Parliament about something, but over 15 000 people got out of bed at seven o'clock on Sunday morning to turn up to the South Perth foreshore, in the member for South Perth's electorate, to walk their dogs and pay 20-odd bucks for the pleasure. It is a great organisation that has a massive amount of support in the Western Australian community.

I saw the member for Maylands' press release headed "RSPCA funding too little, too late". It is worth reflecting on the history of government funding to the RSPCA over the past 11 years. I am happy to do that. I went back to 2001 when the previous Labor government funded the RSPCA to the tune of \$250 000. In 2002 funding was increased by zero—\$250 000 again. In 2003 it was again \$250 000. In the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 state Labor budgets continually funded the RSPCA at the fixed rate of \$250 000.

Ms L.L. Baker: What was our election commitment?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I will acknowledge there was an election commitment, but after eight years the Labor government had a chance to do it. The big thing that people in this state notice about politics and government is that actions speak louder than words. The Labor Party turned around during the last election campaign and said, "We have not increased funding for eight years. We froze it at \$250 000, but if you re-elect us we'll do something about it." Is it any wonder Labor got thrown out! Is it any wonder the Labor Party did not win the last election. People realise that actions speak louder than words. I am over the moon that this government has committed to increase funding to the RSPCA from \$250 000 to \$500 000. We will double its funding for the next four years. We are talking about an extra \$1 million in the RSPCA's kitty. That will allow them to fund three to four extra inspectors, including cars. That will do great things to help the RSPCA to continue its great work. It does an awesome job. The 2009–10 annual report of the RSPCA states it investigated 3 309 cruelty complaints. This government is great because it continues to work in partnership with the RSPCA to achieve a better deal for animals in Western Australia.

Mr M.P. Murray: In the Cottesloe thousand paws walk, I saw a mongrel leading a pedigree—I am sure it was the Premier!

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Mr J.M. FRANCIS: It is not in Cottesloe, it is in South Perth; and it is not a thousand, it is a million. The member really needs to polish up!

The government remains committed to supporting the RSPCA. We wish it well in its continued efforts to protect all animals, great and small. I am over the moon, as I said, to be part of a government that has put its money where its mouth is. I caution members: actions speak louder than words. Election commitments mean nothing if made at the last minute; and after eight years of doing nothing when it had the chance.

DR G.G. JACOBS (Eyre) [3.36 pm]: I would like to express in five minutes the confidence I have in the government bringing down a budget that will meet the real needs of people. I would like to give a short story of a former patient of mine who was under enormous emotional stress and strain with his business, and his marriage had broken down. He made a phone call to his GP. The phone call did not get to his GP. It was only the next day, when the doctor listened to the messages, that Ray was heard calling out for help. Unfortunately Ray had taken his own life by the next morning; a man who was calling out for help.

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Members, I think the member on his feet is talking about something very personal and very intimate. The behaviour from this side of the house is unacceptable.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Ray had a real need. We talk about infrastructure, but we must also talk about support services for people. Ray was calling out to talk to someone. There are many reasons people need emotional help. Vulnerable people need to be looked after such as those with a mental illness, disability, a sickness, terminal illness and people affected by stress. In recent times in my region people have been affected by dry seasons. There have been crop failures in Southern Cross in the Shire of Yilgarn. We hope and pray they will get a significant amount of rain to overcome some of those stresses. This government has delivered a dry season program. I commend the Minister for Agriculture and Food for providing assistance to help lessen the pain of the emotional stress in people who are feeling it.

This government has already announced and strengthened its commitment to Lifeline to the tune of \$500 000 to deliver a telephone support service. This was channelled through Western Australia's first Mental Health Commission, which I had the privilege of being involved with. The services grant is the biggest cash injection from the government to this organisation, to be used to recruit and retain additional telephone counsellors for the 13 11 14 crisis line. I am pleased to say that this government, which I am happy to be a part of, also looks at the compassionate side and the vulnerability side. It is not necessarily all about infrastructure; it is about how we look after people.

Lifeline WA was formed in 1994. The foundation was accredited by Lifeline Australia to operate the Lifeline centre in WA. Its current services include a 24-hour crisis telephone counselling service—a service that I believe could have saved Ray from his untimely end. It has Lifeline education and training programs, Dads@Lifeline, and Lifeline WA Op Shop Treasures. These services are provided by approximately 120 volunteers and 16 paid full-time equivalents. Lifeline answered 25 000 crisis calls in WA in 2009–10. I am happy to be involved in a government that shows compassion to people in vulnerable situations.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [3.41 pm]: I would like to bring this discussion back to the focus that we started with when we moved this motion, and that is the area of low-income and disadvantaged working families in the state. I am glad the Premier is back in the chamber. I think the Premier's government is going to give a much-needed increase shortly—tomorrow, hopefully. I am hearing that it is about 15 per cent, which is about half of what the sector wants. The wage case decision that has just been handed down will, of course, provide a direct benefit to many low-income workers, particularly many women across this country. The Premier would know that most non-government organisations run on a budget under which 80 per cent of that total budget goes into staffing. If those organisations are going to pass on any part of that wage decision to their staff, we can expect that 80 per cent of the 15 per cent increase that the government is going to pay them will have to go to staffing costs. That leaves about three per cent of the 15 per cent increase, on average, for services. I really do not understand, even on a good day, how the government can figure out that three per cent of a 15 per cent increase will manage to have an impact on the level of service delivery that reflects the demand on services at the moment. The Premier himself acknowledged that a huge demand is being placed on people in not-for-profit agencies.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Do you know one of the differences across this house? You see the issue as an industrial relations issue; we see it as a community issue.

Point of Order

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Mr M. McGOWAN: The Premier was insistent that people not interject and be disorderly. The member has five minutes to go. I would ask him to abide by his own rule.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Yes. There is no point of order. However, I did try to protect the Premier, so I ask that he protect those opposite.

Debate Resumed

Ms L.L. BAKER: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I would like to raise some of the facts that the sector has talked about in the past few months. UnitingCare West is on the record as saying that emergency relief requests are in such a bad situation that it is struggling to cope to meet demand. It has had 330 families and individuals per month needing help, and, over seven months, 77 people a week have been turned away without services being delivered. Is UnitingCare West going to try to address that with a three per cent increase? I do not think so. Since 2009, demand figures in agencies, particularly for relief in emergency or crisis situations, have increased by 50 per cent. I do not think the government is going to meet that demand with an increase of 15 per cent. Even if the government breaks the increase into two components and gives these organisations another 15 per cent next year, which would be good, it is still not going to meet the demand being felt right now.

Anglicare's current newsletter for autumn 2011 indicates that a record number of 1 600 men and women need support services. At Christmas, 1 300 families were provided with food hampers because they could not cope. Emergency relief workers in Kalgoorlie have told us that if a struggling family needs \$25 for an urgent or crisis situation, it will have to make an appointment and go back in a week or 10 days to get its \$25, because the workers simply cannot cope with the demand there. The WA No Interest Loans Network—the people who provide whitegoods, fridges and washers to low-income people—also reports that kind of increase in demand. On 5 May, the St Vincent de Paul Society put out a media release saying that it had just recorded its two busiest months ever, with more than 1 700 requests for assistance. It fears that, as winter approaches, those already struggling to cope will be at even greater risk of homelessness. I have not even started to talk about the issues of housing affordability and homelessness. In April 2011, Anglicare conducted some research into people living on low incomes to see whether they could afford private rentals. The results demonstrate that these people are experiencing a very grim situation, as nearly all the properties that were available were unaffordable for them. For a single person with one child or a single person living on a fixed income, no options were available. A senior can actually get shared accommodation, probably with a few uni students, but I do not know that that would be an ideal situation for many pensioners.

I do not mean to burst the government's bubble of the 15 per cent increase, but when I was with the Western Australian Council of Social Service we were looking at 30 per cent. The government has been working with the sector for three years now. Surely the Premier would understand that 30 per cent has shifted; the line has shifted. That is just not going to cut it for these agencies. They might be very happy and excited because the Premier might have smoothed all the edges and buttered them up with this increase, but I can tell the Premier right now that when I talk to the Anglicares of the world, the UnitingCare Wests of the world, the Centrecares of the world, the big NGOs and the little NGOs, I am told that they have queues of people for services that this increase will never be able to respond to. If they are asked how they are going to meet the demand for recruitment and retention of staff to deliver services, they may say that out of the 15 per cent increase that the government has given them this year, they are not going to be able to afford, even if the government puts more in the budget next year, to attract staff to deliver any more services. I take the Premier back to the figure: 80 per cent of NGOs' budgets goes on salaries. They will have to find ways of paying those increases to staff—mainly women—and they will do that, because they have to be able to deliver services. That will not leave very much at all for people in the community to get more services to answer some of the demands that the incredible increases in electricity prices have put on people, as well as the incredible increase of 30 per cent in the cost of water. We must add to that what the government has done to families in Western Australia. By handing out some cash to NGOs, the government is not placating people. They are not stupid. They know what the government has done. They are feeling the pain; they are feeling the struggle. This is not enough.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Minister for Police) [3.47 pm]: I will be very brief, because I know that some of my colleagues want to say a few words on this motion. As the Premier has said, it is a motion that we will agree to, because certainly this government takes very seriously the needs of the community, and we will address that tomorrow. The opposition may well be disappointed by the fact that a very good budget will be brought down tomorrow.

One area that I want to mention very briefly is one that has been very dear to my heart. We have already made the announcement; it was so good that we could not help ourselves! The Premier and I announced that, from 1 July, two-thirds of the amount raised from speed and red-light camera fines will go into the road trauma trust

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account. Since the Road Safety Council Act came into being some years ago, only one-third of the money raised went into that account. However, from 1 July this year, two-thirds will go into that account, leading to 100 per cent from 1 July 2012.

Mr C.J. Barnett: How many times would Labor have promised that?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Many times, Premier. In fact, the member for Midland last promised it, I think, in 2002 or 2001. Labor was going to do it, but it never did. It promised it so many times —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: You're not correct in what you said. You want to make accusations about me, but you're not actually correct in what you said.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: When did you promise it then?

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I did not promise it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The member did not!

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I didn't promise to change the legislation. What I can show you is that we spent vastly more on road safety —

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will find the member's press release; I will definitely find her press release. Labor makes these promises just before election time, but it never comes through with them. We actually carry out our promises, and we are doing that during this term of government.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I tabled in this house double the amount of money. You can go back to my tabled reports if you want.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, the member for Midland promised that all the money from the red-light cameras would go into road trauma.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: A sleight of hand, isn't it?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: No, that is what the member does. That is what she is very good at. I am telling the member quite sincerely that we will —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Are you going to be amending the act?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, of course I am.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: And broadening what you can spend the revenue on?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will tell the member what we are going to do: we will give some certainty to the Neurotrauma Research Program so that it will be funded out of the road trauma trust fund in future. Does the member for Midland oppose that?

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I provided the money! You speak to them! Speak to Professor Lyn Beazley if you don't believe me!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have spoken to them many times and they know the support that I give them.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Speak to Professor Lyn Beazley and ask who instigated giving them the money. I am not having you come in here and telling lies!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Members! Minister for Police, I would like you to get back to what you are talking about instead of goading the other side, because this is a very important motion with the budget coming up tomorrow. I am sure the minister will get back to the point.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Absolutely. We have now guaranteed that through this budget we will ensure that two-thirds of all income from speed and red-light cameras will go into the road trauma trust fund and that in 12 months' time, from 1 July 2012, it will be 100 per cent. That is beautiful news. Previous governments have promised to do it and they did not do it, but we are doing it this year.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Everyone is happy except the Labor Party.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Exactly. The RAC, everybody we talk to and the political commentators are very happy about it, because they know that the Labor government promised it many times but never delivered it. We have delivered on that promise and with those funds we will show a fantastic commitment to the Towards Zero road safety strategy.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: I could not be happier about it, if you are telling the truth. We'll see when you bring in the legislation whether you are telling the truth or not.

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Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Let us see whether the member for Midland supports the bill when I bring it in. It will be very interesting. That is very good news for Western Australians because many people objected to money in consolidated revenue being spent without knowing where it is going.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Midland, you had your chance to speak.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: They would much prefer to know where the money goes. Where did this media statement come from? It came from Michelle Roberts on Friday, 14 September 2001, and it was titled “All red-light and speed camera revenue to be spent on road safety”.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: It was—double the amount! I tabled the details in the house!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: What an absolute porky pie! It never ever happened. We will deliver everything we can to the people of Western Australian in any way we can. In my particular area of responsibility I want to deliver road safety initiatives to help people stay alive.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Because you haven't done anything so far; we've seen the road toll go up and up!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Blah, blah, blah—that is all the member ever does. The road toll was very high under the Labor government. It has come down since she was in government.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: Get your act together, grandpa!

Point of Order

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member for Hillarys is a very proud grandfather and he deserves to be applauded; he gives wonderful support to his family. I think to refer to him as a grandpa in a sarcastic way is very unparliamentary.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I thought that was a rather affectionate thing to call someone.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I refuse affectionate remarks from that member.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER: No, I will not take any more points of order. Members will call members by their proper names, but I think being called a grandad is a great compliment.

Debate Resumed

MR A. KRSTICEVIC (Carine) [3.54 pm]: During the dying years of the former government, this state was experiencing a massive boom and billion-dollar surpluses were being delivered. We talk about non-government organisations and the support they received. I know that during that time NGOs did not receive a huge amount of support from the then Labor government. I know from speaking to the member for Maylands that back then she was also disappointed and expressed her concern that not enough money was going to NGOs during the boom periods. When members look at the Department of Housing and the issue of social housing, not a huge amount of money was going there either. As members heard in statements earlier, not many houses were being built. Now thousands of houses are being built.

Opposition members also referred to power. I remember that prior to the 2008 election the state ran out of power. There were power cuts and people were told to turn off their air conditioners. I remember announcements that we needed to conserve our power and we did not have the capacity to supply people. It is ironic that the former government did not increase power prices or invest in electricity. There were power shortages for business and households and people suffered. I think that is very, very disappointing.

The carbon tax will also have a big impact. I do not see the federal Gillard government showing any compassion to people and thinking these things through. But it is not only that. On the one side are the charges and the revenue that comes in, but on the other side are the commitments that government makes and the wastage there. If we look at the Office of Shared Services and the Perth Arena, we can see that close to \$1 billion has been wasted because of the commitment this government has had to take on board. The spending in many other projects has gone considerably over. If we really want to help people, we invest money wisely in infrastructure that will add value, create jobs and support the community. We do not enter into contracts that will cost us hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in overruns without doing our homework first. It is very, very important to get that balance correct.

The Premier has shown outstanding vision in the past two years in the massive infrastructure commitments that this state has made. The social agenda has also been a high priority during that period and the Premier has

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continually stated that we need to look after all Western Australians to make sure they benefit and receive something from this state. I have no doubt that this budget will deliver on that and that the Premier's commitment to all Western Australians will be seen tomorrow when the Treasurer delivers the budget. The Premier has shown a very good and responsible attitude over the last six months in that area for the greater growth of the state. It is very important to remember where we came from. It is not only charges and taxes. I know those issues are important and people are suffering. Every day we hear about the high cost of electricity and water. It is difficult out there and we acknowledge that. Every day we hear it in our electorates. That message has got through; the government has heard that message. The government is genuinely concerned about the messages that are coming from the community. I do not know exactly what is in the budget, but from what I have heard I know that the budget will be very supportive. The government has been receptive to those messages and I commend the Premier for that.

Question put and passed.