

FEDERAL BUDGET - PRIVATE RENTS

**198. Mr P. PAPALIA to the Minister for Housing and Works:**

Has the Howard and Costello budget delivered for Western Australians struggling to pay increasing private rents?

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS replied:**

I thank the member for the question. As the member will be aware, many Western Australian families are struggling to keep up with rental payments. The Howard government either must be ignorant of this or simply does not care.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I call the Leader of the Opposition to order. I remind the member for Nedlands and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that they both have had three warnings. I insist that they not interject.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** As most Western Australians know, rents have gone up in this state quite dramatically in recent years. In fact, in the past six years, rents have risen some 83 per cent, yet commonwealth rent assistance payments have risen by only 18 per cent. The Western Australian government has something to do in this field, too. We provide bond assistance for people -

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, members!

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Members opposite obviously have the same attitude as Howard and Costello. They do not care about people who are renting. Members opposite probably own their own homes and are quite pleased with the capital growth in their properties. However, there is a range of other people out there. Howard and Costello have said that they will deliver for the battlers in this country, but they have not delivered with rent assistance. The state's part of the bargain is bond assistance, which has been increased. We have injected another \$5.7 million into providing bond assistance. We also provide a greater proportion of bond assistance for people in the north of the state, where rents are higher. We have done our part. We have looked at the current median rent and we have increased the bond assistance to help those struggling families. The member asked what the Howard government has done. It has done nothing. Nothing in the budget papers shows that it cares one iota about those ordinary Western Australians who are struggling to pay their rent. Although rents have gone up 83 per cent in six years, the CRA has gone up by just 18 per cent, because the federal government uses the consumer price index each year to increase it, which means a very marginal increase.

**Mr P.D. Omodei** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the second time.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** In real terms, this means that five or six years ago, commonwealth rent assistance met in the order of 31 or 32 per cent of a family's outgoing rent. Now, only about 22 per cent of their much higher rent is being paid by the commonwealth. When John Howard was last in Perth, I raised this issue with him, and he said that he would have a look at it. He has done nothing. The federal budget is not a budget for battlers. It is not a budget for ordinary people struggling to pay rent, because it has done nothing in this area.