

**BARNETT GOVERNMENT — ELECTION COMMITMENTS**

*Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mr G.A. Woodhams)** outlined that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.17 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for its broken promises and commitments in relation to —

- (i) the cost-of-living assistance payments;
- (ii) tax cuts;
- (iii) Ellenbrook railway; and
- (iv) police officers.

This is possibly the last matter of public interest during the term of the Barnett government. Of course, that provides us with an opportunity to go over some of the areas in which the government has failed to deliver on commitments that it made to the people of Western Australia, and also areas in which it has caused considerable trouble for ordinary citizens in our state. We have an absolute smorgasbord of issues to choose from. To use the words of the Leader of the National Party, there have been unprecedented cost-of-living increases, unprecedented increases in debt levels in Western Australia, unprecedented levels of lost projects in this state, unprecedented levels of advertising by the government using public money for political purposes, unprecedented levels of expenditure by the Premier himself on his own new office complex, unprecedented privatisation and unprecedented numbers of broken promises on solemn commitments made by members opposite in the lead-up to the last election and in the period since then. We had very much material to work with, but what did we do? We decided to pick some of the issues which are very prominent and which impact on some of the most deserving people in our community.

One of the things I want to take up is the issue of, in particular, seniors, but also those people holding various concession cards who are missing out on payments designed to help those people with the least money. One of the things that we on the Labor side of the house believe is that helping people on the lowest incomes is one of the things the government should do. That is part of the Labor Party's DNA. Helping people on the lowest incomes who do it tough in our community is what we are about. I am very disappointed that thousands of Western Australians miss out on the cost-of-living assistance payment which has been in place in various forms for a while and which the government trumpeted all low-income people who held the appropriate concession cards would receive.

I will tell members who these people are. These are people who live in retirement villages around Western Australia. There are more than 200 separate retirement villages around Western Australia. They are also people who live as permanent long-stay tenants in caravan parks around Western Australia. We understand that in excess of 20 000 people are in that situation. Tens of thousands of our fellow citizens in Western Australia are on low incomes and do not have a lot of money to make ends meet. A lot of them are seniors in our community who have lived their lives and gone through some of the most traumatic events in this nation's history. These are the surviving members of the World War II and Korean War generation. They are men and women or spouses of men and women who served our country in some of the most traumatic days in our nation's history. Those people living within these retirement villages and caravan parks are not receiving what they should be receiving to assist them with the massive cost-of-living increases put in place in Western Australia by this government. Why would the government not want to help those World War II generation people in our society? Admittedly, they are old now, but many do not have large incomes; they often do not have large amounts of savings and they are hit adversely by all the cost-of-living increases the government has imposed on ordinary people. They are the ones most adversely hit because they are the ones who are least likely to afford what the government has put in place. We say today that they are people who deserve assistance.

When the government came out with its budget earlier this year, it indicated in all its correspondence, all its factsheets and all its press releases that if people held the appropriate eligibility requirement, they would receive the cost-of-living assistance payment, which is a \$200 payment to assist in offsetting the cost of people's electricity bills. I quote the budget fact sheet —

Western Australian households that hold any one of the following concession cards are entitled to the SCR:

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- Western Australian Seniors Card;
- Department of Veterans Affairs Gold Card;
- Pensioner Concession Card;
- Health Care Card; or
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.

Of course, the predecessor to the COLA payment was the supply charge rebate. The COLA payment lifted it slightly, but in all the documentation released by the government the indication was that 348 000 households with the relevant concession cards would be eligible for the rebate of \$200 for their electricity bills to assist people in the massive cost increases put in place by this government. I have here the ministerial press release by the former Treasurer, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Child Protection in which they indicate exactly that. It reads —

“It is in recognition of these difficulties that we have committed to this new CoLA payment to assist families and householders with their electricity bills.”

It indicates that those people who meet those criteria and hold one of those concession cards will be eligible for that payment. The government committed to that. Indeed, in past elections the government has committed to ensuring that seniors who live in retirement villages and caravan parks will be eligible for that cost-of-living assistance payment of \$200. Tens of thousands of Western Australian citizens, often with very little in the way of recurrent income on a weekly or fortnightly basis, expected to receive the payment and they are not receiving the payment. That is because they live in retirement villages or caravan parks. By definition, people who live in retirement villages almost exclusively do not work. People who live in caravan parks often do not work. They may be of an age or have a disability that does not allow them to do so. These people are not receiving the cost-of-living allowance.

Tens of thousands of Western Australians have been the most adversely impacted by the cost-of-living increases put in place by this government. All the correspondence that the government released surrounding the state budget led these people to believe that they would be the beneficiaries of the \$200 cost-of-living assistance payment. They were led to believe by all this documentation that they would be the beneficiaries. We say that the government needs to get its priorities right. The government needs to help these people who are living in these circumstances with this payment, because they are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the government’s 62-plus per cent increase in electricity bills, yet they are not receiving a cent. They are not receiving a cent because they are often not direct customers of Synergy or Horizon Power; they pay their bills via the owners or managers of the retirement villages or caravan parks in which they live, yet they do not receive any rebates in return. However, they still pay their bills.

In light of the massive increases that the Liberal–National government has placed on these people’s bills, I would have thought it was absolutely incumbent on the government to find a way through that system to ensure that those people can be the beneficiaries of the cost-of-living adjustment payments. I would have thought it was absolutely incumbent on the government and that one of the first things it would do would be to find a way to ensure that those people who are not direct customers—the owner of a retirement village or caravan park is the direct customer—can be the beneficiaries of the payment to which they believe, on just grounds considering all the promises that the government has made, they are entitled. It should not be that hard. It is not rocket science. It should not be that hard to come up with a system. Indeed, some of the representatives of these people have already suggested ways through this issue. Mr Rob Waite, a representative of seniors in Western Australia, has already suggested ways through the system. The government has said it is investigating ways through the system. In the 2005 election campaign, the Liberal Party promised to deliver a way to ensure that all these people would be beneficiaries of these payments. It should not be this hard to put it in place. What makes it all the more imperative is that there have been these massive cost-of-living increases and massive increases in these people’s bills. That is what makes it imperative.

That is why the government lifted the cost-of-living allowance ever so slightly; it rose by \$50 or so over the course of the year. That is why the government did that in the previous budget. The government trumpeted it everywhere because it knew that it was becoming increasingly difficult for people on low incomes to afford to pay their bills. The government indicated to Western Australians across the state that they would be the beneficiaries of this cost-of-living allowance, but we now know that tens of thousands of them are not. It is time for the government to put its money where its mouth is and create a system that allows them to be beneficiaries of those payments. Those seniors living in retirement villages and people on healthcare cards and pensioners on concession cards and those living in caravan parks deserve no less. Just because they live in those arrangements does not mean they should be treated as second-class citizens in Western Australia.

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As I said at the outset, there are numerous areas within which after four years we can take up significant broken promises by the government. My parliamentary colleagues will do so in the areas of tax cuts, undelivered railways and significant breaches of promises in relation to police officers. Indeed, during the course of this week, we will make it a theme to point out all the areas within which the Liberal Party said one thing prior to the election and another thing during the course of its term in government. The Liberal Party has failed to deliver on some of the most fundamental promises it committed to the people of Western Australia. The government has done it glibly, arrogantly and without any remorse. The Premier in his arrogant fashion dismisses any criticism and anyone who points out where the government has failed to deliver on things that it has committed to the people of Western Australia. This final parliamentary sitting week of this parliamentary term will be an apt occasion to bring up all those issues.

**MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park)** [3:29 pm]: I, too, rise to speak on the matter of public interest. In the lead-up to the 2008 election, members opposite said anything to anybody to get itself elected. Now they are going through the process again. We have seen it from the Treasurer today. He has spent four years saying that he is committed to Roe Highway stage 8. If he is, there is an \$800 million hole looming in his budget, because I can guarantee it will not be in the midyear review. We have seen the Ellenbrook train line. I think the Ellenbrook railway will loom rather much like the belltower loomed for the Court government in the 2001 election. The problem is when candidates have the ability to promise trains, aeroplanes, aircraft carriers and helicopters, that is what candidates do—that is the problem.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** That is the problem, member for Swan Hills. If the member for Swan Hills is willing to commit to aircraft carriers for the people of West Swan, he needs to somehow explain why that aircraft carrier has not been delivered. I am kind of curious why the people of West Swan would indeed want an aircraft carrier, but there is no doubt a flyer out there gathering dust with the Ellenbrook train line plan, which says there is an aircraft carrier coming as well.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The member for West Swan said it on 26 May this year.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I must say, I do not know whether you are “Goose” or “Maverick”, but I dare say you —

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Victoria Park! Member for Swan Hills, I do not want you having a heart attack so near to the end of the session! Will you please calm down.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Once “Goose”, the member for West Swan, is wandering around the electorate in his aviator sunnies promising that aircraft carrier, I look forward to the Treasurer at some point saying, “We can’t deliver it, because the other side didn’t do the work on the policy for us.”

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I heard the member for Victoria Park refer to the member for West Swan as a goose!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** The Treasurer is right, and I withdraw that. Of course, the Treasurer is correct—it is the member for Swan Hills who is “Goose”, not the member for West Swan. I thank the Treasurer for that correction.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** But when a member promises a train line and then he breaks that promise on the basis that the former government did not do the policy work for him, he has to expect a bit of a backlash from his electorate.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I move on to tax cuts. We all recall back in 2008 —

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** We all recall —

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Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** This is deteriorating. Member for Swan Hills, I call you for the first time.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. “Goose” is clearly getting himself agitated.

*Withdrawal of Remark*

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

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** We have had a bit of fun on this; let us move on, member for Victoria Park.

*Debate Resumed*

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** We all recall that in 2008 the Premier offered his \$250 million in tax cuts in return for the \$400 000 donated by the 500 Club. On 26 August that year the Premier made this point —

“A Liberal government would allocate \$250 million of tax cuts over our first term in government. That will include tax cuts in stamp duty, payroll tax and land tax.”

He went on to say —

“Reducing taxes for householders ...

The Treasurer has previously described power bills and water bills as backdoor taxes, so one can only assume that we will see from the Premier reductions in power bills and in water bills. We saw this commitment of \$250 million in tax cuts made because the 500 Club donated that \$400 000—that was the quid pro quo. Sure enough, shortly thereafter the Liberal Party election document entitled “Securing the economic future of Western Australia” appeared and there we had it: not only was there the \$250 million in additional tax cuts for families and businesses in the first term of government—not allocated in the first term, delivered in the first term of government—but importantly, the commitment from the Liberal Party went on to say this —

This \$250 million commitment is also in addition to the Liberals’ pledge to return all savings identified by the Economic Audit to Western Australian taxpayers.

As the former Treasurer, the member for Bateman, told us in his budget speech on 17 May this year, the economic audit savings were \$979 million. We had a commitment on the one hand for \$979 million, plus the \$250 million in tax cuts. They will actually not be delivered in the first term of government if the government is re-elected; they will be delivered six years after the commitment was actually made. In light of the fact that there was a tax increase of \$511 million that I cannot seem to find in the Liberal pledge document “Securing the economic future of Western Australia”, my calculation is that the government still has about \$1.4 billion in tax cuts to deliver if it is to honour the commitments it made to the people —

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** And there is a train line; the member for Swan Hills is right. I thank him. I forgot about his train line for a second. There is a train line plus \$1.5 billion in tax cuts still to come to the people of Western Australia.

**Mr F.A. Alban** interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills!

**Mr B.S. WYATT:** One other point I want to address is the cost of living. I have a transcript here of radio ads that were played by the Liberal Party in the lead-up to the 2008 election. I quote one of the radio ads that was played. According to my notes, the ad went as follows —

Strange, but I have not seen Alan Carpenter running ads talking about how the cost of electricity will increase by 72% ...

My power bill will almost double, how does he expect us to pay for that?

That is a very good question. Power bills will almost double, how would he expect Western Australians to pay for that? I certainly did not see Colin Barnett advertising the fact that he was going to increase electricity power prices by 62 per cent. My question to the Premier is: how does he expect people to pay for that? Their power bills are almost double, how does he expect people to pay for that? If the Premier is going to be so disingenuous as to take out radio ads attacking the former government over increases in power prices, then ’fess up and say it will be done by 62 per cent. Be honest with the people of Western Australia. That is why this government cannot be believed at all on future power price rises. We know that the budget has 25 per cent across the forward

estimates—another 25 per cent to come in power price rises. I note that on 6 September this year the Premier, on radio, stated —

But I think the good news for consumers, householders and small business, those increases are now past us.

Those increases that, of course, he did not tell anybody about in the lead-up to the last election —

And we can now look forward to only modest increases at around the inflation rate or maybe a little bit more.

In Parliament, a week later, on 11 September this year, he stated —

... people in Western Australia could expect moderate increases in electricity prices by this government, should it be in power.

That means that instead of an increase 25 per cent as the budget currently has, Western Australians can look forward to a 9.75 per cent increase in power prices across the forward estimates. I thought that commitment has to cost something, so I wrote to the Under Treasurer. I wondered what the cost was and whether it would appear in the midyear review, because I think the people of Western Australia deserve to know the cost of that commitment. The Under Treasurer wrote a letter back to me dated 31 October this year. I read one paragraph of the letter —

In the absence of a formal Government decision on electricity tariffs, the ‘glide path’ detailed in the 2012–13 Budget will be used as the basis for the financial projections contained in the 2012–13 mid-year review. While I understand there has been recent commentary by the Premier on this issue, I am yet to be informed of a formal decision by Cabinet in this context.

So we have the Premier running around on the back of imposing a 62 per cent increase in power bills prices, which was undeclared in the 2008 election. Then we have him now saying, “It’s okay. I didn’t tell you about it last time, but it’s only going to be inflationary from here on in.” Then, the Under Treasurer confirmed that there was no cabinet decision for such a comment to be made by the Premier. If the Premier is to be believed at all, and based on his performance in 2008, he most certainly is not, the midyear review must have in it the cost of the decision to ensure that power bills rise at 9.75 per cent over the forward estimates and not the 25 per cent currently in the budget, or this government, like after 2008, will continue to have broken promise after broken promise.

**MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland)** [3.38 pm]: The motion before the house today refers to the broken promises and unmet commitments of this government. In no area is that more relevant than in the area of its promises regarding police officers. This government, in its Liberal Party policy, stated —

**Recruit an additional 500 police officers over five years and an extra 200 specialist officers to further boost police resources.**

With a growing population and increasing crime rates, more police are needed throughout the state.

Western Australia needs more police on their feet, in the street.

The Liberal Party recognises this and will recruit an additional 500 police officers over five years and an extra 200 specialist officers to further boost police resources.

A visible, well resourced police presence is vital for providing peace of mind and a sense of safety in the community.

How quickly the Liberal Party seems to have forgotten that. Not only will it not be recruiting an additional 500 police officers over five years and an extra 200 police officers, but also we have seen crime rates go up even further. According to its own policy, that should require significant additional police officers. The government seemed to know when it was in opposition that it needed more police on foot in the street. What we have seen is fewer police. We are seeing police resources on afternoon and evening shifts absolutely stretched. In some districts they are battling to put a single response car on the road. If there is a major incident, they need to call response cars from outside the area.

We know that, because of the \$28 million worth of cuts this year alone, it will not be able to meet its recruitment policy. Even if at the end of four and a half years we do get a number that is just a little short of the 500 extra police officers, it will include recruits in training. Every time the government gives a figure of how many additional police officers it has, it always includes recruits in training—that is, officers who are not on the beat out on the street but are still engaged in training at the academy. The government will not come even close to recruiting those 500 officers. It will have had a longer first term of government than any other government in the

history of this state—four and a half years. Yet at the end of four and a half years, it still will not have been able to meet that basic core promise in a core service area of 500 extra police and 200 specialist officers.

The further con in terms of police officers was of course the government's education policy. Under the heading of "School-based police officers" there was a commitment to "Reinstate school-based police officers in consultation with school communities." That was the Liberal Party commitment. What a con! It ran around the state and told the community and schools that it would reinstate school-based police officers in consultation with local school communities. After we had been calling the government to account for this for a couple of years, there was one little part-time trial with one officer in the southern suburbs. I am told that the officer is no longer there and is no longer involved in the trial and that the whole shemuzzle has gone nowhere. The government has not delivered on that commitment to school-based police officers. In the preamble to the commitment it referred to a time when there were 38 school-based police officers working in various communities, some of them working at more than one school. I know that in my electorate in 1998 we had a school-based police officer that was shared between Eastern Hills Senior High School, outside my electorate, and Swan View Senior High School. That was certainly very welcome. The impression was that these officers were going to be reinstated. Nothing of the sort has occurred. It was just a con. This government cannot be believed. It has not delivered on its promises. It has not delivered and will not be delivering on 500 additional police and 200 other officers, nor has it delivered on any school-based police officers.

**MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse — Treasurer)** [3.43 pm]: I will just make a couple of comments and then a few of my colleagues will also participate in the debate. I heard the Leader of the Opposition make the bold statement when he started that he was going to use this time in Parliament to hold the government to account for allegedly misleading the public of Western Australia and for all these horrible, nasty things that we have done. I am just interested, in that context of bold parliamentary debate, why he asked questions last week on issues such as potatoes.

Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** It just about knocked me off my feet. I do not know; I just do not get a sense that potatoes are such a big issue. I could be completely wrong. I could have, as my mum used to say, potatoes growing in my ears.

I want to move on and deal with the particular issues that have been raised. I will deal with two that have been raised and, by way of pre-emptive discussion, one that I think is about to be raised: the cost-of-living assistance provided by the government, taxation relief provided by this government to small businesses of WA and the Ellenbrook rail. I understand that the member for West Swan will soon rise to discuss what is happening at Ellenbrook.

The Leader of the Opposition raised an important point about the problems of passing on the cost-of-living assistance payment to people who are—I think the term is—in sub-metered arrangements. My understanding is that not everybody who lives in a retirement village or a caravan park is in a sub-metered arrangement, but a number of people are. It is an issue that has existed for many years now. It is an issue that existed when the opposition was in government, and it is an issue that we will have to deal with, because the Leader of the Opposition is right; it would seem to be unfair that that benefit cannot flow through to those people when otherwise they would qualify for the cost-of-living payment.

It is important to understand who qualifies for the cost-of-living payment. I also want to more broadly speak about some of the other levels of assistance provided by government to holders of Western Australian Seniors Cards, Department of Veterans' Affairs gold cards, pensioners concession cards, health care cards or Commonwealth Seniors Health Cards. It is clearly targeted quite broadly across our society. My understanding is that about 340 000 Western Australians should be eligible for the COLA payment, but the issue the Leader of the Opposition raises is an important issue. As I said, it is an issue that has been around across an election. It has been around for a number of governments and it is an issue that we will deal with.

In relation to the COLA payment, though, it is important to understand that it was a significant initiative from the government to provide some significant additional assistance to those households that may be finding it difficult to meet cost-of-living pressures. Cost-of-living pressures of course are generated on a range of fronts, unfortunately—in part, government fees and charges; in big part, accommodation charges; and, in part, food and all the other things that people spend money on. The cost-of-living charge replaced the supply charge rebate. The supply charge rebate, as I understand it, was about \$147. The cost-of-living allowance is \$200. That is a 35 per cent increase in the size of that rebate that is paid to eligible people. On top of that is the dependent child rebate that families can also access. What that means, for example, is that if someone with two dependent children is

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eligible, under the new regime they will receive a payment of around \$507 per annum. My advice is that that represents one-third of an average family's annual power bill.

The shadow Treasurer made some commentary about the glide path for electricity that sits embedded within the budget figures and when that will be changed. That is generally changed at the time of the budget. I suspect that that will be the case this time around. I should remind the shadow Treasurer that at the time of the last state election, there was an embedded glide path that sat under the pre-election financial commitment of 10 per cent, 10 per cent and 10 per cent. When I reflect on that time, the interesting thing was that the glide path was never, ever disclosed in the budget papers.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** Have you read the budget papers?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I have. Mr Speaker, I just want to touch on some of the other concessions.

A member interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** If it was, it was in very fine print.

A member interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I have got glasses.

I want to touch on a couple of things. In terms of state government social concessions, appendix 5 of the 2012–13 *Economic and Fiscal Outlook* touches on some of the payments made by government to the people of Western Australia by way of social concession. I will not go through all of these because they are on the public record. But it is important to understand the size of the global figure. Page 285 of budget paper No 3 states —

In 2010–11, the State provided social concessions with an estimated value of \$786.2 million ... up from \$610.4 million in 2009–10 ...

The total value of social concessions ... is expected to be about \$900 million in 2011–12 and to approach \$1 billion ... in 2012–13.

Effectively, what happens in this state on a whole range of fronts, not just cost-of-living assistance, is that the government and, by extension, taxpayers provide concessions to people. They are concessions in and around energy, water, housing and land, rates for pensioners, transport, health, education and so on. There is a massive investment of taxpayer funds in providing social concessions to the people in Western Australia who perhaps find it the hardest to get by. To access the vast majority of those concessions, they need to have financial challenges or age-related challenges; in other words, they need to qualify for a range of pension payments. Some of them live in regional areas, where, for example, a concession is provided for school bus services. The state has been and remains committed to providing social concessions. That amount will approach \$1 billion this financial year. That is a massive increase on the \$610 million that was paid for these types of concessions in 2009–10. Governments do not sign up to a \$400 million increase in concessions to those people in society who need it the most if they are not committed to supporting those people and if they do not acknowledge the unique circumstances and challenges that many of those people face. An increase of almost \$400 million per annum has been provided to the people of this state by way of social concessions. The COLA, Leader of the Opposition, is only one part of that broad suite of concessions. We always need to remind ourselves that there is a variety of concessions. The one thing I know from personal experience in my electorate office is that people have been particularly pleased about the introduction of the ConcessionsWA website. It is a one-stop portal where people can find information about all the different concessions that the state government offers and the eligibility criteria for each of those concessions. If there is one thing that pleases people at the same time as it angers them —

**Ms R. Saffioti** interjected.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** No, it is not a portal. Is it a portal? I am not really up with the terminology. It is a spot that people go to on the internet. At that spot, they can find out about stuff. What really cheeses people off in one sentence and then makes them happy in the next breath is when they find out that there is a concession that they could have been getting but they have not. They have this moment of anger and then this moment of happiness when they discover that the concession will apply. It is an issue of letting people know about the concessions that are available because there is a broad range of concessions.

I want to talk quickly about tax. This government has twice offered significant taxation concessions to small business. Those concessions were provided in and around the payroll tax space. The first concession was delivered in the 2009–10 budget, and it was significant. Basically, it was targeted at small business at a time when there was a feeling that small business may have needed a hand to keep people in employment. We were working into and through the global financial crisis. Basically, the concession was that the government would

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refund to a small business with a payroll between the lower threshold of \$750 000, at which it starts to pay payroll tax, and \$1.6 million, its full payroll tax by way of a rebate at the end of the financial year. That provided a saving of \$46 000 for a business with a payroll of \$1.6 million. I meet a lot of small business people when I travel around Western Australia, and I have not heard one complaint about the rebate cheque that was provided to them by this government in recognition of the fact that some relief was warranted. As I recall, the cost of that concession was estimated to be around \$100 million.

That budget also introduced some land tax concessions. There was a 50 per cent cap on the increase in any one year in the unimproved valuation of properties. I acknowledge it was a small but important concession for those people who had been hit with "steeping" land tax bills in preceding years. There was also the reintroduction of the developer in globo concession, which was designed to make it easier for the property sector to hold and develop land for at least the first year. Again, that was modest. I think it was worth around \$6 million to \$10 million over four years, but it was still an important reform. In the last state budget, the payroll tax rebate was again applied for this financial year. Effectively, that means that for two out of the last four budgets, small businesses in WA with a payroll of up to \$1.5 million to \$1.6 million have not paid any payroll tax.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** What about the increases when you cancelled the legislated tax concessions? How much were they worth?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** That was an issue we had to deal with at the time.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** So how much was that worth over two years?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I am talking about a deliberate decision to provide relief to small business in WA.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** I'm just talking about a deliberate decision to increase taxes on small businesses.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** The advice I have, member for Cannington, is that the payroll tax rebate will impact on about 50 per cent of businesses. About 25 per cent of businesses that currently pay payroll tax will pay none and, in total, 50 per cent of businesses will receive some form of payroll tax rebate. This year, that is costed at \$128 million. There were also some payroll tax rebates and exemptions in and around employing people with disabilities and employing new Indigenous employees.

I heard the shadow Treasurer talk about the fact that we had promised to deliver certain tax cuts or certain tax relief out of the election campaign in 2008. I need to read out one small part of that commitment. It refers to windfall state budget surpluses and revenues being redirected into tax cuts, and there is a sentence that states "unless needed to meet unexpected contingencies". There have been some unexpected contingencies.

**Mr M. McGowan:** There always is in government. You think you're the only ones.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I think we are the only government in a while that has had to work through a GFC, Leader of the Opposition; I do not know. The Leader of the Opposition is a world-renowned expert on everything; perhaps he has worked through a few GFCs. It was a very, very difficult period of time for the state government to work through the GFC. As the Leader of the Opposition knows, property-related taxes collapsed, there was an impact on the rate of growth of payroll tax and state finances went through a period of shock. I would say that that would meet the definition of "unexpected contingencies". One of the other unexpected contingencies that we had to deal with was the collapse in our relative share of the GST that we receive from the commonwealth. We had to deal with a massive impact on state government finances.

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

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** The contribution from GST payments to state revenue as a percentage is down. GST payments from the commonwealth are down. We had to deal with a very dynamic financial environment. The budget papers often refer to the broad measures that we use to measure ourselves around tax. There are three measures of taxation competitiveness listed in the budget papers—the first is taxation per capita, the second is taxation as a share of gross state product and the third is broadly defined as taxation effort. It is a measure that the Commonwealth Grants Commission determines. As has been described to me, effort is really the extent to which the government squeezes the golden goose to try to get the taxation egg out of it, if I can use that term.

In relation to tax as a share of GSP, Western Australia is the lowest of any state.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** What did you used to say about that when the member for Belmont was the Treasurer?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** That is a good question, member for Cannington. I used to say to the member for Belmont that when he came to government, his target around taxation competitiveness was based on one measure, and that was per capita taxation levels. We all know that halfway through the term in government —

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

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**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 13 November 2012]

p8417d-8428a

Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Joe Francis; Ms Rita Saffioti

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**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I told the member that we used three measures to inform us about our tax competitiveness; that is, taxation per capita, taxation as a share of gross state product and tax effort, as advised by the Commonwealth Grants Commission. That has been our measure consistently. When the Labor Party came into power in 2001, it adopted taxation on a per capita basis. When that started to go bad, it went bad quickly, and it changed the measure. That is the point I continually made. When the rule of thumb made the Labor Party look bad, it just changed the rule.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Have you read this year's budget papers?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** No, I have not read the budget papers at all! I am only the Treasurer of the state.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Western Australia's tax settings are higher than those of other states. That's what your budget papers say.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** Our budget papers say that as a share of GSP —

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Western Australia's tax settings are higher than those of other states. I'm quoting.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** That is right. As a share of GSP, what does it say? We are the lowest.

**Ms R. Saffioti:** You just changed the measures.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** No, we did not. We have always had three measures. The point I am trying to make is that under the three broad measures that we use to measure tax competitiveness, our performance around taxation competitiveness has been good.

**Mr B.S. Wyatt:** Not per capita.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** No, not per capita; I admit that. The member for Victoria Park was out when we had that conversation.

The last point I want to touch on relates to the Ellenbrook railway line. The government made announcements around the Ellenbrook railway line; that is, we were not going to build it. We will not be committing to the Ellenbrook railway line in the next term of government. The reasons have been well canvassed in this place. The reason is that the then leader of the Labor Party made a frantic dash to Ellenbrook on the eve of the last state election and stuck signs up all over the suburb, as I recall, that said the Labor Party will build the train line to Ellenbrook. When we came into government, we reasonably expected that the policy work would have been done to support that announcement. Much to our shock, it had not and it was difficult, if not impossible, to justify the investment in that rail line based on the usage numbers that our subsequent research indicated to us. We have been very, very upfront about that. We have not hidden behind smarmy words. We have told people that that is what we are doing.

We have not walked away from public transport for the people of Ellenbrook. We have invested significantly in upgrading the local bus network that services Ellenbrook and Aveley to the east. We have invested significantly in the two different link buses that run from Ellenbrook down to Bassendean station. We have committed to the development of the bus rapid transit system that will service the people of Ellenbrook for a long time to come, and we have acknowledged that at some stage a heavy rail system will service Ellenbrook and the developments that will surely happen to the north of Ellenbrook. I am not sure it will be in my political lifetime but I am absolutely confident that a heavy rail system will service Ellenbrook and the people who choose to reside to the north of Ellenbrook in the future. Nothing we are doing today will take away from that long-term outcome. The bus rapid transit system is a good solution for the people of Ellenbrook in the short to medium term.

We have not stopped there. At the insistence of the member for Swan Hills, we have been to Ellenbrook a lot. We have invested significantly in local roads. The intersection of Drumpellier Drive and Gngangara Road is being upgraded. The section between Drumpellier Drive and Pinaster Parade is being upgraded.

**Mr W.J. Johnston:** Is the Perth–Darwin highway under construction?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** I will get to that in a second. That will be the last point I make before I sit down.

We have provided a grant to the City of Swan to upgrade the intersection of Gngangara Road and West Swan Road. My recollection is that that will be a roundabout. We are also investing in a significant upgrade of the intersection of Lord Street and Reid Highway, down the south of that growth corridor. Since I have been out there, I have not heard a person complain about those investments in roads.

The last measure of our commitment to the people of that area is that we are heavily committed to the Perth–Darwin highway. I had a meeting with my good mate Anthony Albanese last week. We are on speaking terms.

**Mr F.M. Logan:** That's not what he said to me.

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** As long as he signs the cheques, I do not really care what he thinks about me. One of the points we discussed was the Perth–Darwin highway. There is about \$490 million in the last two years of the forward estimates for Nation Building 2 projects. The Perth–Darwin highway will be one of the projects funded out of that. To assist the state attract commonwealth funding, heavily supported by the commonwealth, we are investing millions of dollars in planning for the Perth–Darwin highway so that when it comes time to attract the NB2 money, one of the first shovel-ready projects that we will have available in Western Australia will be the Perth–Darwin highway. One of the first things that planning has indicated is that we need to realign that road. It is an entirely sensible outcome, and one supported by the City of Swan. The one thing that the people of Ellenbrook and, more broadly, the people of the Swan Valley know is that this government, in partnership with the commonwealth, will deliver the Perth–Darwin highway to them and to people who travel through that area.

In relation to cost-of-living assistance, this year almost \$1 billion will be paid to people in this state through a variety of state-funded concessions. In relation to taxation, we have delivered taxation relief to tens of thousands of small businesses the length and breadth of Western Australia. In relation to Ellenbrook, whilst there is not a train line to Ellenbrook, the level of public transport, the investment in road infrastructure and the support of visionary projects such as the Perth–Darwin highway means that the needs of the people of Ellenbrook are well catered for.

**MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Parliamentary Secretary)** [4.06 pm]: On behalf of the government, I wish to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Midland, the shadow Minister for Police, about the police portfolio. I will start by placing on the record my appreciation and recognition of the sacrifice that police officers across Western Australia make. I put them in the same league as firefighters. They are a unique breed of men and women in high-risk jobs. Their families know that when they leave to go to work every single day, there is a risk that they will be confronted with something that may mean they will not come home in one piece. I want to acknowledge the contribution they make.

I wish to start by talking briefly about the Western Australia Police budget. In 2012–13, the Western Australia Police budget is \$1.11 billion. This is worth noting because it represents a 25.6 per cent increase in funding to the police budget since this government came to power in 2008. That is roughly double the 11 per cent growth in the population of Western Australia during that time. From 2008 to now, the population of Western Australia has grown by about 11 per cent but the police budget has grown by 25.6 per cent, which is more than double the rate of population growth. This reflects a significant requirement to increase funding to the police because it had obviously been neglected for some years under the previous government. Over the past four years, this Liberal–National government has added 150 additional police officers and 120 additional —

**Dr A.D. Buti:** What did you promise?

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** I will do the maths. We also employed 120 auxiliary officers, which is a total of 270 officers over the past four years. We are on track to recruit a further 200 police officers and 30 auxiliary officers between now and 2013. That is 300-odd people in a very competitive job market. We are on track to deliver the 500 extra officers by 2013–14, in line with the election commitment.

Interestingly, over that time, reported crime has fallen by nine per cent compared with reported crime under the previous government. Everyone knows that this government and every government around the country at the moment are facing significant pressures on state finances. It is commendable that this government has managed to increase the police budget by that massive amount considering the pressures on the revenue of the state.

It is worth looking at where this money goes. Some of the upgrades to police stations include \$93.27 million for the police complex, which commenced construction in 2010 and will open next year. A new secure state-of-the-art 24-hour police station will accommodate 500 officers and staff. Interestingly, in my own area—I am sure the member for Cockburn appreciates this, although I am not quite sure where the Labor Party stands on the issue of building this police station because it opposes police hubbing—a \$20.5 million Cockburn Central police station —

**Mr F.M. Logan:** Police stations should be in the community.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** That is great, member for Cockburn. I can go back to the Labor Party's commitment in 2005. I am happy to read it out. I am holding up an advertisement from the local paper entitled “Tougher Penalties and Safer Streets: A top priority for Mark, Norm and Francis”. It commences —

We all know someone who has been a victim of crime ... and all of us get angry reading about violent crime, particularly against old people:

Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Joe Francis; Ms Rita Saffioti

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On the right of the ad is a list of commitments from Mark McGowan, “determined, active and well qualified”; Francis Logan, “committed, determined and approachable”; and Norm Marlborough, “friendly, caring and hardworking”. Number five is a push for a lock-up at Rockingham and a new police station at Cockburn. What happened to the police station from the former Labor government?

**Mr F.M. Logan:** The land is there right next to the shopping centre.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** Another Labor lie! Proof, once again, that these people will say or do whatever it takes to win an election. In 2005 there were full-page ads in the local newspaper saying that Labor would build a police station at Cockburn. It failed, and failed dismally! We are delivering a \$20.5 million 24-hour regional police hub. I know there is a difference between the Labor and Liberal Parties, member for Cockburn, on the issue of police hubbing. At the end of the day what people care about when they dial 000 is how long it takes to get a police car to their house, or wherever they are in danger, not how many little community police stations there are which are only open 12 hours a day. They care about response times.

**Mr F.M. Logan:** Surrounded by illegally parked cars and beer bottles is a sign for the new police hub! It is a joke.

**Mr J.M. FRANCIS:** After the Labor Party made that commitment, it did not put a single cent into a police station at Cockburn Central—not a single cent. There are other things we are spending money on. Fitzroy Crossing Police Station opened in 2012 at a cost of \$11.17 million. Mt Magnet Police Station is to be completed by the end of this year at a cost of \$8.2 million. Mundijong Police Station will be completed by 2015 at a cost of \$8.2 million. The community safety network, which I am sure is appreciated by everyone in this place, will replace the current regional radio that works with trunk calls, to a conventional digital radio network. It not only means that police will be safer but also will deliver higher speed and higher data communications over much longer ranges. That will be a great tool to enable police to do their job more efficiently and more safely in regional WA. This network has an estimated total capital cost of \$80 million, funded of course by royalties for regions. It is anticipated that the trunk radio network will be commissioned in 2013. This government is getting on and doing what is needed to help regional police officers in Western Australia do their job safely and more efficiently.

I say in closing to the member for Cockburn that I appreciate there is a difference between our sides on the issue of police hubbing, but the one big question that people in our electorates want to know is: if Labor wins the election in March next year, will it commit to building that police station? Will the Labor Party commit to building that police station? The answer is no. The member for Mindarie said he does not want to get into a race to the bottom on law and order—that is because everyone knows the Labor Party will not win! It failed on law and order, it is an absolute failure, and the people of Western Australia know it!

**MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan)** [4.13 pm]: I rise to go through some of the key points raised today. The key issue relates to the cost-of-living assistance payment. This payment was designed to assist people on low and fixed incomes to deal with the massive cost-of-living increases imposed by the Barnett government. There have been massive increases in electricity prices—62 per cent. Thousands of people who should be receiving this payment are not receiving it. They have had to incur massive cost-of-living increases including massive increases in electricity prices. Many people on fixed incomes are not getting the new COLA payment. This government has to address this fundamental issue. The member for Vasse said a number of times, “It’s a serious issue and we have to deal with it.” The COLA payment was announced with much fanfare in May, yet now—in November—there are thousands of Western Australians who are not receiving that COLA payment because of arrangements with managers or owners of villages or caravan parks. The Labor Party urges the government to address this issue as soon as possible. Hundreds of people in my electorate, living in long-stay caravan parks, are not getting the COLA payment. It is there to help people facing massive increases in their cost of living and they are not getting it.

In relation to access to information on this, I heard the Treasurer again highlight this new portal. Residents in my area have been very confused when trying to get information about this COLA payment. I made calls on their behalf trying to figure out how they can access it. I urge this government as a priority to fix this problem, to allow those on sub-metered properties to get the COLA assistance. It is only the fair thing to do. Otherwise we are leaving a huge proportion of people on low and fixed incomes without the extra assistance needed to try to deal with these massive increases in cost-of-living expenses.

I want to touch quickly on the Ellenbrook rail line—a massive broken promise by this government.

**Mr J.H.D. Day:** Are you going to build it?

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Did the government break a promise? This is a government that has refused to acknowledge —

**Extract from Hansard**

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 13 November 2012]

p8417d-8428a

Speaker; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Troy Buswell; Mr Joe Francis; Ms Rita Saffioti

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Several members interjected.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order, member for Swan Hills.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** This was a core promise. It was the Liberal Party's biggest election promise and it broke it. The Premier still refuses to acknowledge that broken promise. I am glad the member for Swan Hills interjected —

**Mr F.A. Alban:** I am glad you take a lot of notice of me, member; nobody else does in this place!

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** That is probably the most correct thing you have ever said, member for Swan Hills! I do take notice of you and no-one on your side does! I feel sorry for you on that front.

**Mr F.A. Alban:** I want you to build a statue!

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Swan Hills, I call you to order for the second time.

**Ms R. SAFFIOTI:** Let us go through it. We saw what the member for Swan Hills did before the last election. There was a commitment to build the rail line. I have recently come across more literature from the member for Swan Hills. I will go through his new commitments to the Swan Hills electorate —

The Liberal State Government is **committed to the total upgrade of Gngangara Rd ...**

Where is the money? There is no commitment. The letter continues —

With our Government's commitment **to the Perth–Darwin Hwy** at a cost of \$900M ...

This is in the member for Swan Hills' letter, which further reads —

The Ellenbrook Secondary College has been extended ... Another **Secondary School at North Ellenbrook will open in 2015 ...**

I just checked the budget papers to see how much money is there—\$500 000 in 2015–16. The government needs to do some quick work. Under the heading “Road infrastructure projects underway in Swan Hills”—not committed to—it is stated that the Perth–Darwin highway is underway. There is not even a metropolitan region scheme amendment for planning north of Tonkin Highway. There is no MRS amendment. It says here that the projects are underway. We have not seen the Reid Highway–Lord Street lights, which were meant to be finished by late this year. The other key project “underway” in Swan Hills is the rapid bus transit to Ellenbrook. Again, they are false promises by this government.

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (26)

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

Noes (30)

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

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Pair

Mr J.N. Hyde

Mrs L.M. Harvey

Question thus negated.