

## COOK GOVERNMENT — PERFORMANCE

### *Motion*

**HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral)** [10.15 am] — without notice: I move —

This house notes the inability of the Labor government to overcome the many and significant issues impacting the Western Australian community and calls upon it to use the forthcoming budget to address these issues.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** This is a very important motion because we are leading into the very last opportunity for the Cook Labor government to make amends for its seven years of failure in Western Australia. This will be the last budget before the 2025 election. I think that many Western Australians hope that this will be the last budget of a Labor government for some time. So many issues are coming to the fore and the government has failed to deliver services in the way that Western Australians expect, in the richest jurisdiction in the world. Our hospital system is in a mess. It is on life support. Western Australians cannot understand how this government is unable to deliver the most basic services in the richest jurisdiction, with the highest budget revenues in the history of Western Australia.

This motion calls upon the Treasurer, Hon Rita Saffioti, and the Premier, Hon Roger Cook, to make amends for seven years of failure and to focus on the needs of Western Australians because it is the Cook Labor government's very last opportunity. This is a tired Labor government that has failed to deliver the most basic needs and requirements for housing in Western Australia. As was so aptly and professionally prosecuted and identified by the shadow Minister for Housing, Hon Steve Martin, the public housing waitlist in Western Australia is an increasing challenge. This is a tired Labor government that cannot deliver the most basic requirements or supply housing, with massive rent increases in regional communities and now even in the City of Perth. Last year, rents grew by 15 per cent and we had record low levels of residential tenancy vacancies. The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia released a minor adjustment of the figures the other day, but at such record low levels, the pressure is on for people who want to put a roof over their head.

This is a tired Labor government with no plan to address the crime epidemic. Last night we heard members opposite trying to say that policing has improved in our state. This government has a soft-touch approach to crime, and it has no ability reassure our frontline officers, and they are leaving in droves. This government cannot keep police in the employ of the Western Australia Police Force in the numbers that we would like to keep our streets safe.

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Under this government youth crime is out of control; we have violent crime at almost double the rate it was when this government came into power. This is the last opportunity for any sense of restoration, for this government to make amends in the budget coming forward. Despite my call on the Premier to adjust the budget and make sure it focuses on the needs of people in Western Australia, I have absolutely no confidence that this government is going to be able to do that. This is a government that squandered the boom; it squandered the revenue boom in Western Australia. As I expressed recently in my second reading contribution on the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2024, the government is failing to focus on creating the agility we need in Western Australia's economy. It is failing to enable the much-needed pipeline of development to create the next generation of wealth in Western Australia, such that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia says that there is over \$300 billion of projects currently in the approvals pipeline, and this government is unable to focus on that issue. Many of those projects are being delayed and, in fact, many are going offshore because of the regulatory burden that this government—particularly the Albanese government in Canberra with its radical ideas. Its radical ideas have no bearing on the real circumstances of Western Australia's unique economy and unique environment. It is causing much fear and concern in the investor market in Western Australia.

This is a government that is not building the foundations for the future for our children. This is a government that is not building on the basic services that are needed in Western Australia. It is a tired government that is instead leading ever-increasing debt and projected record levels of debt into the future, despite over \$40 billion of windfall gains, if we compare year on year from the time those projections appeared in the forward estimates to the time they are expressed in the budget papers. There is over \$40 billion in windfall gains and despite the promises this government gave back in 2017 that it would drive efficiency into the Western Australian economy and bureaucracy, this government has failed to deliver and it continues to build into bureaucracy. Its focus is on creating offices in Canberra and on building new offices here in Perth. Instead of dealing with the issues of red tape, we saw this government's response to the Vogel–McFerran review. The review was about those issues that are so important to environmental approvals. Out of those 30 odd recommendations, as far as I can tell, only one

Hon Neil Thomson; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Steve Martin; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Wilson Tucker; Hon Martin Aldridge

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recommendation has been delivered or announced, which is the establishment of a new office in Perth. That is all this government can do.

We must not focus on bureaucracy; we must focus on delivery. This government cannot deliver a single thing. In my remaining time, I will focus on the health system. The health system is in crisis. This health system is in the worst situation it has been in many decades.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** The Australian Medical Association stated —

We have increasingly heard stories of people dying waiting to be seen in public hospitals that are operating at breaking point, patients waiting years for essential surgery, and ambulances ramping outside hospitals because there are not enough beds and staff to cope with demand.

That quote was relayed by the Leader of the Liberal Party, Libby Mettam, yesterday in the other place. This is of great concern to the opposition. Our shadow Minister for Health has been raising these issues over and again. Despite that, we see that this government has run out of ideas.

The only thing this government can do is another trip overseas by the Minister for Health. Instead of finding a solution to skilled worker shortages and our overworked health workers, she took a 10-day taxpayer-funded trip to India to target Indian doctors and nurses, when so many health workers should have had priority. This is a government that can only do trips overseas and is not focusing on the real issues, right now, in terms of the delivery of our health system.

This is a government that sent four ministers to Canberra to go to an empty office where not a single member of Parliament from the federal government attended from outside Western Australia's Parliament—maybe not even a single member of Parliament. There was a \$6 000 opening ceremony without a single stakeholder. We expect that an embassy-type arrangement would bring people in to try to create an interest or a vibe for Western Australia. No, this government cannot even deliver on a vibe, which it constantly talks about. It cannot deliver on anything in Western Australia because this government has failed to focus on the genuine needs of Western Australians.

Western Australians deserve better. Western Australians currently have out-of-control ramping rates. People are left in corridors on beds, waiting for beds to become available, with significant wait times. This is in the richest state in the world. If Western Australia were a country, it would rank among the very richest per capita in the world. This is a state with record revenue coming into the coffers year after year—\$40 billion windfall gains, and the state cannot deliver. This is a government that focuses on vanity projects and will not even answer the questions of the opposition and answer questions about the true costs and cost blowouts of those projects. This government will not talk honestly to the people of Western Australia about delays on projects, which are costing us more and more. This is a government that cannot plan. We saw the incredible flurry of activity to fit the time line of the Metronet project around an election cycle. We spoke to people in the development sector, who said it was hard to get skills in Western Australia to build important apartments to keep a roof over the heads of Western Australians because the government had soaked up the skills. Instead, this government has thrown caution to the wind and only focused on vanity projects so it has some ribbons to cut in the lead up to the March 2025 election. The people of Western Australia will see through it.

This is a boom that the people of Western Australia are not feeling. This is a boom that people of Western Australia do not see on their tables or when they go to hospital or when they queue for rental accommodation. This is not a boom that the people of Western Australia are feeling; this is a boom that only the Western Australian government and the Western Australian Labor Party are feeling as they travelled to India, as they travelled to Canberra, and as they make sure they call in favours for new events so they can go to corporate boxes and hang out with the elites of the state and enjoy free events with key players who come to Western Australia. This is the sort of boom that the Western Australian government seeks to have and the Western Australian Labor Party is enjoying. It is the boom that the people of Western Australia deserve to feel.

In January of this year, 50 clinicians from St John of God Midland Hospital wrote a letter, which stated —

We as the clinicians are desperate and are exhausted.

Listen to that for a moment —

We as the clinicians are desperate and are exhausted.

That is a plea for help from those important frontline people in our health system. It continues —

We are working in a ticking time bomb, another Aishwarya incident will happen.

Those are the words of health professionals who wrote that letter this year.

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This is our challenge. Last year, ambulances spent more than 52 000 hours stuck outside hospitals. Last night, members opposite expressed outrage over some of the comments I made during my contribution to the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2024 and said that I was gilding the lily about the record of the Barnett government in health, which was exemplary. In 2016, the Barnett government focused on service delivery despite the extraordinarily low price of iron ore. This government has never had to face a crisis like that; it has never had to face a spot price for iron ore of under \$US40 a tonne. This government has simply been the beneficiary of the \$400 billion private sector investment that was driven by the amazing approval systems that the Barnett government put in place so that we could deliver a functioning economy as we waited for the recovery of the iron ore price. This Labor government has squandered its \$40 billion windfall surplus on vanity projects, its own endeavours.

**Hon Pierre Yang** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, member! Clearly your interjections are not hitting the mark. I suggest you refrain.

**Hon NEIL THOMSON:** Thank you, President.

This government has never had to face the challenges of an iron ore price below \$US40. It has never had to face the difficult challenge of the GST rolling backwards to such a low level that it was down to around 40¢ in the dollar. That, and the considerable advocacy by all Western Australians and members across the chamber, led to the reform by the coalition government. The bipartisan advocacy to the federal coalition government led to the floor price that now underpins the ongoing revenue streams in the Western Australian economy and preserves some level of protection against the profligacy of spending by this highest spending Treasurer in the history of Western Australia.

Surgery waitlists in Western Australia, the richest jurisdiction in the world, continue to grow. There has been a 55 per cent increase in the number of people on elective surgery waitlists. In 2017, the elective surgery waitlist was just under 20 000 cases. We can do the comparison. When will the Western Australian Labor government admit that its criticism of the Barnett government with 10 000 hours of ambulance ramping is a stellar achievement? There were distortions of the truth in the lead-up to the 2017 election. Here we are, with 52 000 hours of ambulance ramping and those poor patients stuck outside hospitals waiting to be seen in an emergency department to receive treatment. The Western Australian health system is groaning under the pressure of neglect and failure by the Minister for Health, Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson.

It is unacceptable—absolutely unacceptable—that 10 000 children are waiting to access a paediatrician in the metropolitan area. This figure was obtained last month. We understand that the wait times for paediatric services can be up to two years. We have seen how this Labor government has operated in the positioning of the women's and babies' hospital. Instead of taking advice from clinicians and professionals, the planned build will be located many kilometres from the Perth Children's Hospital, which will be a suboptimal outcome for the women, babies and children of Western Australia and present a huge challenge going forward.

The waitlist for primary school-aged children has jumped by 2 200 children. The median wait time has gone from 17.8 months to 21.3 months in the year since February 2023, just in 12 months, and at a time when we continue to see the additional surpluses, as projected in the midyear review, rolling through the door. This government is tired, out of ideas and failing. How can it be in almost the richest jurisdiction in the world that our health system is failing so badly? How can it be in the richest jurisdiction in the world that we are seeing record levels of violent crime and police officers leaving the Western Australia Police Force in droves? How can it be in the richest jurisdiction in the world that people are lining up for those rare opportunities in our rental housing market and sit for years on the social housing waitlist? How can it be in the richest jurisdiction in the world that we are seeing an incredible rise in the cost of living, with families struggling to meet the most basic of needs and demands?

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition)** [10.36 am]: I stand to support the motion. Most notably, I stand to support it with regard to my two areas of responsibility; that is, police and corrective services. The government must address these two areas in the forthcoming budget because they are in crisis. The cover of COVID has risen; the shield of COVID with regard to crime has lifted. The government talks about a reduction in crime. Yes, drug use has reduced. Why? Because the borders were closed. What about domestic violence? We have the highest rate on record according to the government's figures, not ours. In the regions, we have the highest crime rate on record according to the government's figures, not ours. What about crimes against the person? We have the highest rates on record. Why? Because, quite frankly, you guys have taken your eye off the ball. The government talks about an additional 950 police officers by 30 June this year. The

government will not get anywhere near that number. We have heard ad infinitum from the Minister for Police, “We’ll definitely get there, we’ll definitely get there. It’s not a problem.” Every time I have espoused concerns, the minister has accused me of scaremongering, undermining the police et cetera. Rubbish! I was out there listening to police officers. Believe it or not, police officers have talked to me, and they are not happy campers at all. There have been mass resignations from the police force—mass, like nothing seen before. More than 1 000 police officers have left the force in the last two years, which is against the annual average of 150 a year. Think about that, guys. One thousand police officers did not like what they were getting under the Labor government. The government has to do something to address that issue. The minister has constantly said that those resignations are entirely attributable to the economy and other opportunities. He had his speaking notes and that just rolled off his tongue whenever someone put a camera in his face. That really upset the police; they are not happy at all. They said, “No, it’s not that, mate.” There are other issues within the police force and the government that need to be addressed. I will talk about this at length during my budget reply contribution. If the minister thinks that that is the reason that most police officers leave, he is deluded—absolutely deluded. The government will not get there; it is about 500 short of 950 officers. Yet, on 1 February this year, the minister stood in front of a media conference and said, “We are definitely going to achieve that 950.” One month later, he said, “Oops, no we’re not. We’re not going to get the 950. I’m going to do a review.” That is the response I got in the chamber, which, if members were listening, they would have heard. Listen! The police are desperately calling out for assistance. If members opposite do not want to take my word for it, I have an excellent opinion piece from the president of the WA Police Union from just a couple of weeks ago. I will not read the whole lot, but I will read part of it. It reinforces the points I have been making for the last three years.

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It states in part —

In 2020, the State Government promised WA that the police force would be bolstered by 950 extra officers above normal attrition by this year. As of today, WA Police are about 500 officers short of that target.

At the end of June, there were 6845 sworn officers. At the time, WAPU estimated WA Police would need a net gain of 892 sworn officers over the following 12 months if the McGowan/Cook Governments’ promise of 950 additional officers was going to be met by June this year.

The minister recently said he visited every policing district across the State and reported that officers are very “happy in the service”. Unfortunately, officers are all too aware of the backlash if they breach police regulations by speaking out to a Member of Parliament.

I will have more to say about that, at length, in my budget reply speech. It continues —

Police officers are leaving in droves, and if one reason could be stapled to the issue, it would be low morale. Officers are being given the bare minimum, and being asked to achieve the same as if the force were at full strength.

It goes on to say —

We are over 500 officers short of the Government’s promised full time strength expected by June 2024, but then you add in the officers who are on career breaks, long-term sick leave, secondment to other sectors and the result is a bleeding force trying to do the best they can.

It finished with —

The low morale of our police officers is a combination of many factors, but lack of compensatory acknowledgement from this Government is the worst one.

It is imperative our officers are genuinely listened to, and immediate action is taken by the State Government and WA Police Force. A failure to do so will lead to a disseminated force; this cannot happen for the sake of the community of WA.

I could not agree more; that is what I have been saying for three years. Apparently, the police union and I do not know anything; the minister knows everything. However, the minister had to eat some humble pie in the last month and acknowledge that he had in fact been wrong for the last four years.

The other area that is absolutely haemorrhaging and has been handled appallingly by the government is corrective services. The government knows that it is low-hanging fruit. Out there, it is not a vote winner, so it does not really matter. Just ask corrective services workers whether they are happy. We had to FOI the census because this open, transparent government would not give us the results of the census from the public sector. The census found that

79.3 per cent would not recommend corrective services as an occupation; 20.7 per cent would. That is damning. More importantly, there are issues right across the board. I have been getting a plethora of concerns about bullying, sexual harassment and a lot of other areas from Bunbury, Broome, Kalgoorlie—a whole raft of areas. I am going to table a petition to that effect in here shortly. The worst issue of all, of course, is with regard to juvenile justice. The Labor government should hang its head in shame. When hundreds upon hundreds of juveniles are attempting suicide every single year, you have a problem. Of course, that is just one part of it. When an officer stands and points a gun at the head of a 16-year-old Aboriginal girl and thinks that that is acceptable, you have a problem. That is a real problem. Unfortunately, I say: rest in peace, Cleveland. Cleveland Dodd took his life last year because you guys would not listen to the issues about unit 18. You would not listen. If you had listened, that young man might be alive. At this stage, hundreds of juveniles in unit 18 and Banksia Hill Detention Centre have attempted suicide. That has happened in the first three months of this year. That place—unit 18—must be closed. It was meant to be temporary. In your own words, it was a temporary facility. At an estimates hearing a couple of months ago, we were told that the new facility is not going to be up and running for another two or three years. How many more lives will be lost under your guidance before you wake up? Go and read what was said in the coroner's hearing last week into Cleveland's death. It was haunting—absolutely haunting. I am going to read an extract from an analysis piece from ABC online news that pretty much captures all the issues with regard to unit 18. All I can say is that it is an excellent, well-written article. It is everything that I have been saying for the last three years. I have been consistent on this issue, as has every juvenile justice advocate in Western Australia. The article reads —

Behind cement walls and metal doors, children are locked away for more than 20 hours a day.

Sometimes they're let out for an hour. Sometimes, for that hour, all they can do is walk up and down prison corridors.

These children live in inhumane and unlawful conditions, and it is all happening in Western Australia.

A coronial inquest into the death of Cleveland Dodd, the state's first recorded death in youth custody, has given the public a first hand account inside the notorious Unit 18.

But they are children.

Children kept in a section of a maximum security adult prison.

...

In July 2022, shortly after Unit 18 was gazetted, then-Corrective Services Commissioner Mike Reynolds described it as a "short-term youth detention centre" ...

The coroner's court has heard otherwise.

The "cohort of high-risk male detainees" put in Unit 18 are virtually all at risk of self-harming or suicide, a nurse told the inquest.

Yet, over and over, the inquest heard from the people working inside that it just wasn't possible to ensure their safety.

It wasn't possible to ensure people like Cleveland didn't hurt themselves.

"It would seem that Unit 18 and what it was designed for, is not what it was used for," Coroner Urquhart said.

**'A leaky boat'**

Preventable, avoidable and a tragedy.

Those were the words Cleveland's mother Nadene Dodd continually heard being used to describe her son's death.

Inhumane, war zone and a leaky boat destined to sink. Those were the words used to describe Unit 18, by the people who worked inside it.

...

In the past, the state government has been at pains to make clear that Unit 18 was a youth detention wing, and not an adult prison.

Now the inquest has heard that distinction meant Unit 18 did not have access to any of the necessary facilities the adult prisoners had.

No mental health team, no intensive supervision units, and no dedicated medical space.

But that's where the government decided to send our most troubled youth.

It goes on; I do not have time to finish it. Unit 18 is a disgrace. The government needs to close it today.

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [10.46 am]: I stand to support this excellent motion, this timely motion and this balanced motion moved by my colleague Hon Neil Thomson. The facts are incontrovertible. There are always problems for any government to deal with, but, over the course of my adult life, I have not seen this combination or, to quote a word used recently, omnishambles of competing dysfunction that is going unaddressed.

**Hon Sandra Carr:** Oh, come on! That is an inappropriate use of that term. What a disgrace. What a way to use that word. It's disgraceful. You should be embarrassed. Sit down now.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** President, I make the observation that the word "omnishambles" is a combination of Latin and English. It has been popularised in popular culture. Yes, it was a word used by Justice Lee in his excellent judgement the other day. If I could categorise the problems bedevilling Western Australia —

**Hon Sandra Carr** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Thank you, President. I am at liberty to choose any word I wish.

**Hon Sandra Carr:** Yes, but you are still responsible for the use of it. Disgraceful! Absolutely disgraceful!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** Unfortunate as it is, I think the interjections, flailing as they are, are indicative of the core problem here—an inability to grasp the fact that things have gotten worse in Western Australia in health, mental health, education, law and order, youth, justice, child protection, housing and social housing. On every key metric, every key service line, that this government is responsible for, it is failing to deliver. It is failing to meet community expectations and community standards. It is an obligation of not only an opposition or a crossbench, but also members of government of professional and personal integrity, to identify that there are problems in Western Australia, and, frankly, very serious ones. What strikes me about this motion, though, is that we have to continually drag the government kicking and screaming to face up to the responsibilities of government. One can talk to the facts about the increase in the number of assaults, a broadening and growing incarceration rate, public hospital elective surgery waiting lists and the like.

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I have now formed the view that the government is impervious to the fact that it will not look itself in the mirror. The more useful question might be: why is it that in the face of these facts, the command of both houses of Parliament and an enormous budget, the government refuses to face the facts? One reason might be that there are members of the government who refuse to deal with reality and engage in the fundamental disciplines, obligations and duties of being a member of Parliament. For example, the member for Carine. The reason the government is not dealing with issues is because some of its members refuse to engage with their constituents. I quote from page 12 of today's *The West Australian*. I will not quote the entire article, but there are some phrases that I think would do us all well to reflect upon.

**Hon Darren West:** Be careful.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** I am quoting from a published document. I do not know why I would need to be careful.

**Hon Darren West** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** In reference to the member for Carine, the article states —

His electorate office on Beach Road shares a building with nearly a dozen businesses, with one tenant claiming it is locked even during business hours.

Members of the public must request access through an intercom and cannot see into the office.

A staff member who works for a business in the same building said some constituents had gotten angry because Mr Lilburne was never available.

"I've seen the local MP attend the offices about four times in the last year, and we're at the premises all day, every day," the tenant said.

"They insist and force members of the public to speak through an intercom. They actually don't have an open office to the community ...

...

The neighbouring tenant said he had heard one resident “shouting and getting quite aggressive ...

“The rest of the building has completely opened tenancies with normal office doors,” ...

The journalist who wrote the story did a compare and contrast and went to visit other offices of members of Parliament that were open. When confronted with this fact and when asked for comment, to contribute to a fair and balanced article, what did the member for Carine do? The article states —

The West contacted Mr Lilburne for comment, but he said he was “not available” and hung up the phone.

His response to an accusation of being unavailable to his community was met with that beautiful quote. That distils the problem. The lack of self-awareness demonstrated by this member absolutely underscores the thesis of my contribution that the reason perhaps nothing useful is being done to remediate —

**Hon Martin Pritchard:** Member, just because it’s in the paper doesn’t mean it’s true.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** It has not been challenged. Going by my personal experience and that of my colleague Hon Peter Collier, can the member guess what we deal with? The constituents that that member refuses to deal with. We know it. We have known it for years. Part of the problem is this. The government won an enormous majority, but, frankly speaking—I have grown up in Carine, my parents live in Carine, I know the area well—the people of Carine did not necessarily vote for the member for Carine, Paul Lilburne. They voted for Mark McGowan. The great irony is that for all those members who won their seats on the basis of standing next to a cardboard or corflute life-size cut-out of the ex-Premier, that cardboard cut-out had more energy, capacity and ability to engage with the community than the members that that cardboard cut-out helped to elect. Western Australia deserves better than this. The electorate of Carine deserves better than this. The best thing that those constituents could do, come the election, is to vote for someone of integrity, capacity and energy—my friend Liam Staltari. We need to vote for the Liberal Party. This is the only course of correction because the government refuses to live up to its responsibilities. I tell all Western Australians that if they want a change, if they want a health system that works, a police force that works or anything to work, vote Liberal in March 2025.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! You were very close there.

**HON STEVE MARTIN (Agricultural)** [10.55 am]: I also rise to support this excellent motion from my colleague Hon Neil Thomson. It is a very timely motion with the state budget just around the corner. This motion refers to the various issues confronting this state government, and there are many.

Before I get onto the substantive motion before us, I want to reflect on discussion in this place last night about the Treasurer’s Advance Authorisation Bill. We received a history lesson from various members and it always amuses me how often, after seven years, members opposite still refer to the Barnett government. Those members are in charge, and they have been for seven years, but whenever this matter comes up, they refer to the Barnett government, and they continue to do so. Hon Darren West painted the Barnett government as having the worst financial management record in Australian history. I lived in Victoria in the 1980s. John Cain and Joan Kirner are names that will probably ring a bell for members opposite. In 1992, Victoria’s state debt was \$32 billion, in 1992 dollars. The most recent Victorian government has tried very hard to match that outstanding record. The Victorian debt is currently \$126 billion and heading towards \$250 billion by 2027. I just thought I would give members opposite a brief glimpse of history.

I move on to the issues before us and I will make some remarks about housing, which is my shadow portfolio. More grim news was revealed in the Parliament recently regarding the social housing waitlist. As at 31 March 2024, there are now 20 132 applications on the public housing waitlist representing 35 924 Western Australians. This includes 5 327 priority applications representing 10 392 people. Not everyone on that waitlist is homeless or in desperate need of a home tomorrow, but it is a very good indication of the need for social housing. The government’s priority waitlist now tops 10 000 people. We know that people on that priority waitlist are desperate for a home and will wait for years. Despite being identified by this government as a priority, it is a wait that will last years, very sadly. That is very disappointing for those people.

Interestingly, we have been asking this question in the house now for some time. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and I regularly ask for an update on the list and it is received, but the answer now comes with a caveat or a rider, and this happened quite recent. The answer I received to my question without notice on Tuesday, 16 April states —

The number of individuals represented on public housing applications should be read with caution —

That is one way of describing it —

given that individuals may be counted on multiple applications. The Department of Communities advises that there is double counting in this figure.

We actually do not know how many it is, but I guess that is the minister's way of saying that it is a big number, but it is probably less than that. We thought we would check how many people have been double counted.

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This is the response we got yesterday —

Double counting is present as part of the waitlist's composition, given that an individual may be listed as a householder on more than one application at any one time; this is why it does not form part of regular verified reporting.

That is possibly fair enough. It continues —

It is not possible to confirm the extent of double counting without a manual review of individual files.

The vast resources of the Department of Communities simply cannot work out how many people it has on two, three, four or five applications. This is the department that is managing that waitlist. That is extraordinary. It might be a task for the housing supply unit to look into—that unit that is apparently well-funded and well-staffed but slightly short on desks. It should have leapt into action by now. It was announced by the Treasurer last October, and I am sure it is about to do some good work. It might know how many are being double counted.

One of the reasons that the state Labor Party finds itself in this position with social housing is its appalling record on delivery. Again, in response to a question I asked in this place recently, we received the number. After seven years of Labor, we have 114 more social homes than we had in 2017. That is 16 a year that it has added. Is it any wonder that the social housing waitlist continues to grow? The minister says it often enough that people are falling for it: "I'm adding thousands of social homes a year." In fact, at a meeting of local governments that Hon Shelley Payne and I attended recently, she quoted a figure of 2 000 new social homes that had been added. The people who were interested said, "Gee, that's a good number." The minister keeps saying it: "We've added 2 000." The actual numbers that I have received indicate that as of 30 June 2017, the total housing stock was 44 087 and as at 31 March 2024, it was 44 201. That is 114 more homes. They are the best efforts of the Western Australian Labor Party. Again, this comes with a rider. It comes with an excuse —

The Cook government has inherited significantly ageing and derelict stock from the former Liberal-National Government, including Brownlie Towers, where there was more than 160 derelict apartments counting to overall housing stock.

I assume that what happened was the Labor Party came to power in 2017, quickly identified all that appalling housing stock, apparently, and immediately leapt into action. In 2017, it found that the place was a mess and leapt into action and sought to fix the problem. Here is what it did. The best work of the Labor Party is on display in its social housing new build completions from 1 July 2017 to 30 November 2023. In 2017–18, it built 52 homes. It identified that the place was a mess and a disaster and it leapt out and built 52. In 2018–19, which was a particularly quiet year, it did 20, or one every couple of weeks. It was still working out the scale of the problem. In 2019–20, it did 47. Things were humming. At peak activity in 2020–21, the Labor Party did 93. It has scaled up a little bit since then and we have finally got past where we were in 2017. After seven long years, we are 114 in advance of that number.

The Minister for Housing has recently identified one of the reasons for what is going on, and this is a direct quote from the minister when he recently unveiled the seven new quite expensive apartments in Hamilton Hill that have been added to the social housing stock —

"I don't think it's clocked with all Western Australians yet that we are the fastest growing state capital, with 220 people coming to Perth and Western Australia each day."

Minister Carey, Western Australians know exactly what is going on in the housing market. It might have just occurred to him that this is happening, but Western Australians absolutely know that the rental vacancy rate continues to be well under one per cent. Two to three per cent is normal. There are almost no places to rent, rents are rising, the social housing waitlist continues to grow month on month, and new starts are not happening. I think there are 3 000 homes for sale in a city of a couple of million people. Western Australians are well aware of what is happening in the housing space and expect more from a Labor Party that makes promises.

Very quickly, on land supply, how do members think the 12 sites that were identified as part of the lazy land housing diversity pipeline and announced on 18 February 2022 as a solution to land supply in Western Australia are going two years later? I believe one of those sites has been developed and has moved forward, but not to



completion. Two years later, there are no homes on the ground. They are moving ahead very slowly. The Labor Party has plenty to do and we expect more in the state budget.

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [11.05 am]: Normally, in these debates on a Thursday morning, I can take copious amounts of notes to respond to, but I did not write that much down this morning. I can inform the house of and respond to two things that were raised by the mover of the motion. The first is the assertion that the Cook government, and the McGowan government before it, cannot deliver on anything. That is an invitation for me to tell members the things that we have delivered, so I will. The other matter raised by the mover of the motion was the efforts of the Barnett government in its last budget before the 2017 election, so I am going to have to respond to that as well. Hon Tjorn Sibma also made the point that facts are incontrovertible, and that I agree with, so I am going to give the house some facts about our achievements and some facts about the Barnett government's budgets and, in particular, where it left us with its last budget before the 2017 state election.

To start at the beginning, the Liberal–National government left us with a budget predicated on yearly rises of seven per cent in electricity prices and six per cent in water prices, on top of net debt being on a path to \$44 billion. Power and water prices were expected to rise by \$200 a year in its last budget. The then government was planning to sell assets worth around \$5 billion, including Western Power. The then Treasurer, Mike Nahan, called it a budget for tough times and blamed the state's soaring debt on the plummeting iron ore price and the Barnett government's inability to secure a better share of the GST. The then Premier, Colin Barnett, enjoyed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with the mining boom revenue, only to squander it, with a record level of debt that was described at the time as taking a decade to recover from. It projected land tax and payroll tax increases and selling off assets to pay for it. That well-known left-wing think tank—that is irony for the purposes of *Hansard*—the Centre for Independent Studies found that WA had passed just one of the 10 key budget indicators over the previous three years. And, of course, it lost the AAA credit rating from all the major ratings agencies.

The proposition behind this motion is that our government has failed to deliver anything over the past seven years. I am not going to have time in 11 minutes and 55 seconds to list all the things we have delivered, but I can certainly do my best to list some. In terms of jobs, which is at the core of what Western Australians want for themselves and for their kids, we have created more than 250 000 jobs, despite COVID-19 causing one of the biggest global economic shocks since the Great Depression. Historically, we have had low unemployment and the lowest underemployment rate of any state in the nation. We passed the Western Australian Jobs Act to maximise opportunities for Western Australian businesses on government projects. We have restarted railcar manufacturing in WA after the Liberal Party shut it down in the 1990s. We have invested over \$37.8 billion in this term of government in economic infrastructure and diversification so that we continue to be the nation's powerhouse of jobs and the economy. On the cost of living, we have delivered at least \$1 400 in household electricity credits to every Western Australian household since 2020, providing direct cost-of-living relief to WA families. We have made travelling in our suburbs cheaper through the two-zone fare cap on public transport. We have introduced the regional airfare cap, making airfares far more affordable for Western Australians. We have introduced the WA rent relief program to help financially vulnerable tenants at risk of eviction to remain in their own homes.

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Of course, we did not proceed with the Liberal Party's plan to privatise our energy system. Have we not seen how well that has worked out for energy consumers on the east coast? We have prevented skyrocketing increases in our household power bills.

We have invested a record \$2.6 billion in housing and homelessness, already delivering more than 1 650 social homes, with another 1 000 under contract or construction. We have increased housing supply by investing \$150 million in grants for community housing across the state. We are supporting regional housing via the 80 million infrastructure development fund, the remote communities fund, unlocking lazy land and major planning reform to cut red tape. What was the Liberal Party's position on those major planning reforms? It opposed them! To boost housing supply, we are subsidising apprenticeships and supporting businesses to bring in skilled workers to boost our construction workforce and get more homes built.

We have a record health and mental health investment, with an unprecedented \$10 billion in new funding over the last three years. We have the highest level of health funding per person of any state in the nation. We have added 571 new beds to the system in the past two years. That is the equivalent of a whole new tertiary hospital. Despite global health workforce shortages, we have increased our health workforce by almost 25 per cent. That includes almost 3 500 new nurses and nursing support staff, 1 350 new medical FTE and more than 1 500 new allied health worker FTE. We have committed to introducing nurse-to-patient ratios, starting at the Perth Children's Hospital emergency department. We have cut ramping by 21 per cent in 2023 compared with 2022, and there has been a

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44 per cent reduction in December 2023 compared with December 2022. We have delivered a record number of elective surgeries and procedures to reduce elective surgery waitlists.

We are recruiting an additional 1 100 police officers across WA, with 300 people in training at the academy right now. I will run out of time to address all the matters that I want to because we have achieved so much.

In terms of the economy, we have stood up to Canberra and got back our fair share of the GST. We regained our AAA credit rating, which was lost under the Liberals. The irony of the party that puts itself up as the conservative managers of the state's finances losing the AAA credit rating. That myth is busted! Labor governments in Western Australia have reinstated our AAA credit rating, consistently delivered strong economic growth, and invested a record \$33.9 billion in infrastructure to deliver jobs and to benefit Western Australians for generations to come.

Most recently in education and training, the school assistance program has been incredibly well supported and taken up, providing real, practical assistance for parents with school-age children, whatever part of the education system they are in. In partnership with the Albanese government, we have boosted funding to public schools by \$1.6 billion, with 130 fee-free TAFE courses across a key range of industries. We delivered the biggest investment in TAFE capital works in WA history after decades of neglect, and after the previous Liberal–National government put training at TAFE beyond the financial capacity of ordinary Western Australian families.

Since 2017, we have delivered 30 new primary schools and nine new secondary schools, with more to come. We are upgrading, refurbishing and redeveloping schools across WA.

On social policy and reform, we have passed historic reforms that have fully decriminalised abortion. We introduced and expanded Target 120, which is an early intervention strategy for at-risk young people aged 10 to 14 years, to turn their lives around and improve family and community safety. We delivered our first 10-year homelessness strategy and removed the statute of limitations for historical child sex abuse. Yesterday in the Legislative Assembly, we introduced significant legislation around the Gender Reassignment Board. I have to note, as a sidebar, the appalling performance in our chamber last night. It is one that I think should make the rest of us embarrassed that we have to share the chamber with the person who made those comments last night.

On Metronet and transport, we have delivered 72 kilometres of new rail, 23 new stations and returned railcar manufacturing to Midland, with the reestablishment of the Bellevue railcar facility, which will build 246 of our Metronet C-series railcars and six new diesel railcars for the Australind. We have delivered major roads around Perth and throughout regional Western Australia, boosted cycling with principal shared pathways around Perth and introduced the one-metre safe passing rule for cyclists.

On the environment, we committed to net zero emissions by 2050 and making it law, and retiring state-owned coal-fired power stations by 2030, which will reduce the state government's carbon emissions by 80 per cent. We are implementing our nation-leading Plan for Plastics to phase out single-use plastics, as well as the Plan for Our Parks, which is our vision to create five million hectares of new national and marine parks to protect the environment for generations to come. We also ended the logging of our magnificent south west native forests.

I will not have time to go through all the significant policy procedures and funding we have put in place throughout regional WA, but we have delivered record investment in regional WA, including \$11.2 billion on infrastructure and \$2.7 billion over the next four years to subsidise power and water bills for regional Western Australians. We will upgrade 8 500 kilometres of regional roads by the middle of this year under our regional road safety program. We delivered upgrades and maintenance at every public regional school as part of our school maintenance blitz. We guaranteed the future of royalties for regions, as promised, with \$4 billion allocated to the program over the next four years.

In the few minutes that I have left, I want to turn to a couple of cost-of-living measures because I think they are incredibly important. I reiterate that the WA school student assistance payment provides \$250 for every secondary student and \$150 for primary and kindergarten students to help families with school expenses. It is a direct payment to families. I note—it is worth the house noting as well—that the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, the peak body that represents P&Cs at public schools, noted on its Facebook post that the program will assist parents with the cost of school essentials like books, IT equipment, sport and music costs, stationery, shoes, uniforms, excursions, and camps.

**Hon Peter Collier** interjected.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Honourable member, parents have costs in every term in the school year.

Let us not forget that when the state government announced its electricity credits to all Western Australian households, Hon Dr Steve Thomas—who I notice is out of the chamber on urgent parliamentary business—labelled them as untargeted cash handouts. From that, I assume he does not support them. Libby Mettam, the

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Leader of the Liberal Party in the Legislative Assembly, called the school assistance payment lazy, and called on household fees and charges to be frozen. The Liberal Party has pretty much been a policy-free zone, but apparently this is the hint of a policy that it would freeze household fees and charges. We have frozen household fees and charges in the past, and it fails. All a freeze achieves is to push those increases to fees and charges down the road, and the cost of delivering services then increases each year.

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**Hon Martin Aldridge:** I agree.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** What was that, honourable member? I didn't hear you.

**Hon Peter Collier:** He was agreeing with you. Why didn't you do it for energy?

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** I just want to check with Hon Martin Aldridge, did I miss an interjection?

**Hon Martin Aldridge:** I said this in my reply to the budget speech a couple of years ago.

**Hon SUE ELLERY:** Good.

That means the funding has to come from elsewhere. I look forward to the Leader of the Liberal Party telling Western Australians where that funding will come from. What will the Liberal Party cut to make up the difference when it freezes fees and charges? This is assuming it sits on the government benches in March 2025—give it your best shot, folks!

The general principle for budgeting across government is that prices generally recover costs. This government has delivered much to the people of Western Australia. There is a lot more to do and we cannot wait to do it.

**HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral)** [11.20 am]: I rise to speak on this motion. It is timely and I thank Hon Neil Thomson for moving it, considering where we are in the year and the election cycle, with a budget and an election coming. As the election approaches, I expect and eagerly await the standard level of pork-barrelling that we have grown accustomed to, perhaps short-term sugar hits in the form of energy credits and a sports centre or two in marginal electorates. I note that the Rockingham by-election produced a \$100 million-plus sports centre. I am willing to overlook, and perhaps forgive in a certain respect, this frivolous expenditure because it is almost expected as part of our political system, and both sides are certainly guilty of it. It is an unfortunate by-product of our political system in Australia and certainly in Western Australia. However, if the government is going to throw money around in the form of short-term benefit for itself and, arguably, for the Western Australian population, I would like to see as part of the budget some long-term thinking about the long-term prosperity of Western Australians outside the four-year election cycle. We get locked into this short-termism loop of government. We really need to think long term about where we want to be as a state, the prosperity indicators that the population cares about and what we should see in the future, beyond the next election. This government is in a perfect position to think about that.

As noted, we are an extremely wealthy jurisdiction. If Hon Dr Steve Thomas were here, I would look in his direction and he would give me a bit of an indication of where the budget surplus is likely to sit. I have heard numbers from \$5 billion to \$6 billion being thrown around, but whatever it is, it will be massive.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Is it?

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** An amount of \$5 billion to \$6 billion is pretty significant.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** You know what it is, do you?

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Does the Leader of the House know?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** Members, this is not a chat!

**Hon WILSON TUCKER:** Okay.

Gazing into my crystal ball, I think it will be in the \$5 billion to \$6 billion range, which is significant and massive. We know that the price of iron ore will not stay above \$US100 forever. There have been some rumblings with commodity prices, with rare earths and minerals, that really should be setting off some alarm bells for members opposite. For a number of years now, governments on both sides of politics have been guilty of being asleep at the wheel and content to dig things out of the ground and put them on ships. We know that will not be the case forever. We cannot rely on, especially, iron ore forever. As the value of our export portfolio shrinks, questions will be raised about those who were sitting on the government side when times were good and what measures they put in place during that period to think long term and set up WA for success in the future.

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Recently, I was very fortunate to have a conversation with Sophie Howe, who is a sustainable futures and wellbeing adviser, and the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. This is a recent appointment by the Welsh government, which is thinking long term. It has legislated this role in an independent advisory body to really cut across different government departments to advise on what the Welsh people want to see as long-term prosperity indicators and goals in the future. It is really breaking out of short-term thinking and the short-term political cycle and thinking long term, making sure that the public sector and departments are accountable for those goals. In our system, ministers have their portfolios and they can be quite siloed—departments themselves are quite siloed. We would think that all parts of government speak to each other but over the last three years I have learnt that that is absolutely not the case. It is extremely siloed and our interoperability and long-term vision is not shared across departments. That is certainly the case when ministers have their own mandates with the political party of the day—those things do not trickle down, and we get stuck in a short-term cycle. The model in Wales seems very good. I will certainly pay some attention to it. There are certainly some parallels here with what the Voice referendum was trying to achieve by enshrining an advisory body in the Constitution to advise and suggest policy to government for the future, based on its goals. If it is enshrined in the Constitution, it cannot be changed by the government of the day. It is a similar case in Wales, where that body has been enshrined in legislation. It gives a long-term roadmap and has the ability to breathe, move and advise across all levels of government. It is a fantastic model.

Another thing that would be good to see would be some thinking in the budget about measures, other than economic ones, to measure the health and prosperity of the economy and the people who live here. Payroll tax is a massive line item in the budget. If Hon Steve Thomas were here, he would probably give me an indication of where it sits—iron ore royalties and payroll tax are massive. WA has some of the highest rates of payroll tax in this country. It is okay for the resources sector and the tier one companies that can afford to pay it, but it is incredibly difficult for smaller businesses. It is prohibitive for them to expand and grow. If we want to diversify our economy and we want companies headquartered here, we should look at payroll tax. I do not think it is a good long-term measure of the economic growth of WA. It feels like a short-term sugar hit to the government of the day's bottom line.

The situation is similar with iron ore. We know we cannot rely on it forever, so I encourage the government to think about some long-term indicators and metrics. We heard about a wellness budget at a federal level, and something similar in WA would be a good idea—something beyond those short-term measures through which we can set some long-term goals and measure prosperity for the Western Australian people.

As I said, I am willing to forgive and forget the pork-barrelling we expect over the next couple of months. We are gearing up significantly for this election. A lot of Western Australia people are seeing through some of the spin. We will see this government claiming to be a good economic manager by paying back a fair amount of debt, you could say, but just enough for it to claim it is a good economic manager. I do not think paying back debt is a bad thing but there are political motivations around how much the government is paying back and why it is doing it. We will see the same thing with sports centres and tax credits. I would really like to see some longer term thinking about economic indicators and measuring the long-term prosperity of the state while the getting is good, because, as we said, this is a once-a-generation opportunity. I think history will look back and judge this government for the decisions and measures it has put in place to set this state and the people of Western Australia up for future long-term prosperity.

<010> J/2

**HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural)** [11.29 am]: I rise to support the motion moved this morning by the shadow Treasurer. It is a timely one as we head into state and federal budget season. This will be the last state budget of the Cook Labor government before the election. We are expecting a lot from it. There are many things that this government needs to address and must address in its last budget before facing the people of Western Australia in 2025. It was interesting listening to the debate this morning about fees and charges. The Leader of the House took an interjection from me. It is something that I have found quite interesting and I think similar comments have been made by Hon Neil Thomson in previous budget replies around the challenge that Western Australia has in not having the Australian Taxation Office. When targeting relief to households, in many respects we try to do it with one arm twisted behind our backs. I have often talked about the impact of simply freezing household fees and charges as opposed to putting downward pressure on them because, I agree, the government is just pushing the problem down the road. It is the same with cash handouts. Electricity tariffs keep rising year on year, but people would not know because they are getting a rebate, sometimes several rebates, and at some point the cash rebate system will stop. Those households, perhaps some of the most vulnerable in our community, will then get the full force of several years of tariff increases. There are also structural issues that impact agencies, particularly agencies like the Department of Fire and Emergency Services that is primarily funded by the emergency services levy.

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When the government during COVID froze household fees and charges, it had an impact on agencies like DFES and its ability to fund its operations from the ESL. I am not sure how many state government agencies or businesses can have no cost increases year to year, particularly in the current inflationary environment. We are seeing significant cost increases and so trying to find a mechanism and a balance between meeting those cost increases in an inflationary environment. Managing and placing downward pressure on household fees and charges is not an easy task to do right.

It is interesting; I went to my annual ratepayers' meeting this year. It is usually not a very well attended event, and it is usually over in about five minutes. The annual report of the Shire of Gingin is noted and then we enjoy a cup of tea afterwards. This year we had quite the town hall meeting. I think somewhere in the order of 20 motions were put forward by the community, all asking the Shire of Gingin to do something. I was keeping a bit of a back-of-the-envelope calculation and stopped once I got to about half a billion dollars, and then the last motion of the night was, "In light of the cost-of-living pressures on families, we call on the Shire of Gingin to freeze rates for the next three years." I think the next budget for the Shire of Gingin should post out a calculator with every rates notice and ask some of the ratepayers how they might achieve a balanced budget in the context of increasing demands, wants and expectations. Some of those are reasonable, but at the same time when asking for there to be no increase in revenue it is, in many respects, an impossible task.

At this time of the year as we head into the budget, members of Parliament and the government will receive a number of prebudget submissions that there will be public awareness of. I want to draw attention this year to an excellent submission. Its timing was excellent as it was delivered to members late last year. Often we get prebudget submissions at this point in time when they have missed their opportunity. All credit to the Western Australian Local Government Association for releasing its prebudget submission in November last year. I think it is probably one of the best prebudget submissions that I have seen in my time here and in particular chapter 5, which speaks to disaster resilient communities. I note an announcement in the last week from the government entitled "Biggest boost for career firefighters in more than 50 years". Of course, many in the community are welcoming this. In isolation, it is concerning if this is the prebudget announcement for emergency services; one big element missing is our volunteers. We must recognise and remember, members, that the majority of our emergency response capability in Western Australia is delivered by volunteers. The majority of those are a function of local government and local government continues to get drip fed by the emergency services levy in an unsustainable way. I still hold hope for this budget, the last budget of the Cook government before facing the people of Western Australia, that it will start to walk the walk rather than just talk the talk about the risks that our communities face now and into the future.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.