

NET DEBT — 2023–24 STATE BUDGET

312. Mr D.R. MICHAEL to the Premier:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to responsible financial management.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how last week's budget continues this government's record of strong financial management?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house how this government continues to pay down Liberal–National debt?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

- (1)–(2) The budget handed down last Thursday confirms that Western Australia has gone from the worst performing economy in 2016–17 to the best performing economy in Australia. When we arrived in office, the state had just been through a recession under the last Liberal–National government. We now have, in this financial year, the highest economic growth in nine years. It confirms that we have gone from the worst net-debt-to-revenue ratio in Australia to the best. It confirms that net debt is now \$16 billion less than that projected under the last government when it was in office. Under the budget handed down the other day, net debt will fall by the end of this financial year to \$27.9 billion. Let us compare that with other states, some of which are heading towards \$150 billion or \$160 billion, just so members know. It is the fourth consecutive year that debt has declined. It is our sixth consecutive year in surplus and it shows we have been successfully paying off the mountain of debt left to us by the Liberal–National government, which will benefit future generations. We are now the only state with a AAA credit rating from Standard and Poor's. Moody's, the other major credit rating agency, said in light of the budget the other day that the state projects that fiscal surpluses will be maintained over the forward estimates —

... which continues to underscore the stark contrast between the State and its domestic peers.

That is, the other states. We have been able to reduce debt and been able to provide support for families in terms of cost of living. There has been a record investment in public works in both the city and the country and a record investment in our health system. We have set aside money from surpluses for projects like the women's and babies' hospital, the new desalination plant and the new plantations, which were ignored for years under the previous government, to ensure we have a ready supply of timber in future years. All those things we have managed to do as part of this and last year's budget.

It is a stark contrast to the opposition. I listened to some of their speeches. They are sort of saying that debt has not gone down. I am kind of wondering what budget they are reading and whether they are reading another state's budget! It is Western Australia; I do not think they have looked at our budget. They would want to probably check the front page! They are probably looking at another state's budget! Anyone would think, listening to the opposition leader's speech, that Western Australia is a dim, dark, horrible place. It is like something apocalyptic; I remember Kurt Russell in *Escape from New York*. It was like *Escape from New York*! It was a dim, dark, horrible place full of zombies and terrible things occurring listening to his speech. It was so horrible that I was frightened at the end of his speech how bad it is in Western Australia—how shocking this place is! It is nightmarish what is going on in the Leader of the Opposition's head. It is a real nightmare how bad he thinks things are. When I go outside and I look around, I see a bright, successful, vibrant state in both the city and the regions, which is leading the nation, whereas he just sees this horrendous apocalyptic zombie paradise. It is a difference of perspective but I think most people are optimistic and not the deep, dark pessimists that the Leader of the Opposition is.