

STUDENT ASSISTANCE PAYMENT

165. Mr S.N. AUBREY to the Minister for Education:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to supporting Western Australian families facing cost-of-living pressures.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the new Western Australian student assistance payment will support all WA students and families, regardless of their financial circumstances?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether he is aware of anyone who does not support the delivery of this important payment to WA parents and carers?

Dr A.D. BUTI replied:

- (1)–(2) Thank you, Madam Speaker. In recognition of your 30 years of outstanding service to the Parliament and the people of Western Australia, I will try to keep my answer brief, but it will be difficult.

The SPEAKER: All right. The clock is on!

Dr A.D. BUTI: I thank the member for Scarborough for his question and for his support and recognition of this outstanding announcement that the Premier and I made on Sunday. As the Premier has outlined, this WA student assistance payment will benefit every single household in Western Australia that has a child from kindergarten to year 12. It is an outstanding announcement. As was briefly outlined by the Premier, we will be encouraging people to use the ServiceWA app to apply. Applications can be made from the first day of the second term. It should take roughly seven to eight days for the application to be processed and for the money to be deposited in the bank account. It will be a payment of \$150 for students in kindergarten to the end of primary school and \$250 for secondary school students.

It is interesting that within hours of this announcement being made, the member for Roe, as is his way, was negative. He is reported as saying —

“Families have already told me the application process for this funding is burdensome. It was a strange decision to gatekeep this funding behind the clunky and unhelpful ServiceWA app.

He said that people have started complaining to him about it. How could they have started complaining to the member when the application process will not start until 15 April? Within hours of us making this decision, did the member have people ringing him up to complain about the application process? I do not know whether there is much credibility behind that, member for Roe. If the member is going to criticise something, he has to have some credibility, and there was none.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Dr A.D. BUTI: There was no credibility behind that statement. He knows that was not true, so he should not peddle falsehoods. No-one approached the member to complain. If anyone approached him, they would have said, “Isn't it fantastic that I am able to use this money in the second term!” But the Leader of the Opposition says that it should have been done before the school year. Does the member know that there are summer and winter uniforms? School camps and school balls also take place. There are other expenses. All the expenses are not paid on day one; they go throughout the year. I think this money will be very well received, but by all means, if the member wants to criticise it, he should go out and criticise it and see how successful he is with his criticism. Is the Leader of the Opposition going to criticise this decision?

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: He is going to criticise it! He does not think that people will benefit from this.

Point of Order

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Once again, the minister is asking rhetorical questions and is well on his way to another of the lengthiest answers in question time.

The SPEAKER: I am not upholding that as a point of order.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Dr A.D. BUTI: We have also had criticism from the Leader of the Liberal Party that it should have been means tested. In an exchange earlier today with the Deputy Premier; Treasurer, the Leader of the Liberal Party complained that we will not be means testing this payment, which has been targeted to households with school students. She said that we should have frozen household charges. When I asked her whether that was means tested, she said, “No, but it's targeted.” I asked her who it is targeted to, and she said it is targeted to the households of Western Australia. That is okay! There should be no means testing for that, and charges should be frozen for every

household in WA. But because we are providing a targeted payment for families who have students at school, that is no good. That is amazing! Her logic really leaves a lot to be desired, particularly when she stated on 31 January this year —

“At a time where the Cook Labor Government is enjoying the largest boom in the State’s history, it’s inexcusable that increasing pressure is being put on schools because struggling Western Australians have not received meaningful cost of living support.”

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: Are you not supporting this?

Ms L. Mettam: We have continually supported cost-of-living support.

Dr A.D. BUTI: You would be supporting this, then, would you not? It is a joke. It is a real joke when —
Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members may recall your opening remarks, minister.

Dr A.D. BUTI: That is a good point. But it is a joke when the members of the Nationals WA, also known as the secular agrarian socialist party of Western Australia, who have never had any fiscal responsibility in their lives and do not know how to balance the books, talk about means testing. All they want to do is spend money and they do not care whether the books are balanced. For them to talk about means testing really is an absolute joke.

I will finish on this, Speaker, in honour of your thirtieth anniversary. What I want to know from the opposition is: should families in Mandurah or Midland miss out? Should families in Karrinyup or Kalgoorlie miss out? Should families in Busselton or Bunbury miss out? Should families in Esperance or Katanning miss out, member for Roe? He should tell us, if he is going to criticise, who should miss out. This is an outstanding decision, as the Davies family said on Sunday, in the email response that the Premier read out. Families support this because this is a major cost-of-living measure in regard to the expenses that students and their families have to cover.