

TREASURER'S ADVANCE AUTHORISATION BILL 2024

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON NEIL THOMSON (Mining and Pastoral) [5.05 pm]: Thank you, President.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Maybe you could perhaps focus on the content of the bill.

Hon NEIL THOMSON: Yes, President. Thank you for your guidance. I appreciate it.

We are looking at structural weaknesses in the Western Australian economy and some of the challenges we face. Under this government we seem to be building structural challenges into the future. We are creating a situation in which some of the weaknesses and headwinds that might arise in the future and are referred to on a regular basis in the budget papers will actually occur within the next 12 months and into the term of a future government. This will create additional challenges. We have seen from this government a pattern of not really being absolutely transparent going forward, in terms of the costs it is building into the future of Western Australian government expenditure. An enormous provision of \$2.8 billion was included in the budget as part of the midyear review because of expiring key public sector industrial agreements.

That will be very interesting to see during an election year, given that there are so many expiring agreements. I must say that I recommend a level of caution and care to the government. Yes, our teachers and police deserve more, but the dissatisfaction we see in the public service is multifaceted. It relates to wages, of course; we have seen wage caps being put in place for many years and many of our key workers have fallen behind the average salary rates of other jurisdictions. That creates massive challenges in terms of attraction and retention. I hope there is very careful deliberation from the government going forward.

The \$2.8 billion was put into the budget to cover a range of agreements, including PTA transit officers; schoolteachers; TAFE lecturers; VenuesWest; the Arts and Culture Trust; Main Roads; salaried officers; prison officers; public servants; government officers; social trainers; Insurance Commission of Western Australia employees; school support officers; miscellaneous employees; and police officers.

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The challenge here is having a balance. The path the government has let go of is making sure we have those frontline services delivered in a way that is effective with the results and the outcomes we need. That is a massive challenge. We have to make sure those officers are respected and provisioned with the sufficient level of security in their roles. That is a massive challenge. It is probably the area on which I have the greatest sympathy for the government, because it is difficult to manage. Every time there is an underlying wage increase, it will be hardwired into future budgets. This government has liberally used cost-of-living top-ups in a way that has not been done before. The general addition last year was \$3 000. That is really kicking the can down the road for the long-term cost impact on the budget's bottom line. During estimates I raised the question of whether, when the ratings agencies look at our books and ask about risks of our future of public sector expenditure, they counted that extra \$3 000 as a recurrent cost. These one-off cost-of-living measures and boosts to salaries mean that the expectation is set that they have to be built into future cash flows. Either that happens or at some time the government will have to bite the bullet and say, "Sorry, folks, you'll no longer get those cash handouts or those additional amounts." Of course, that would cause a lot of dissatisfaction across the community.

This brings me to the issue on page 316 of budget paper No 3 of 2023–24, which I raised at the last estimates hearings. I put the minister representing the Treasurer on notice that I will come back to this at the next estimates hearings because it is very, very important. In the table on page 316 I picked up the estimated impact of those government fees and charges on the representative household and the claim by the government in the budget papers that there was only 2.4 per cent growth in those fees and charges, which I do not believe stacks up. I certainly questioned it, and I did not believe that I got a satisfactory answer about why it was not included. There is a figure for stamp duty on general insurance, for example, at the 2023 level, but there is a footnote. Footnote (j) states —

Stamp duty in 2023–24 has been estimated using 2022–23 insurance premiums to isolate the price impact.

I know that sometimes public servants are very good at sneaking around the truth when there could be pressure not to present something in a more transparent way. Maybe we can go to some more detail about why it was not done consistently in the previous year just using the year-on-year amount. Why was it not done? In the 2022–23 midyear review—last time, not the most recent one but the one before—there was this massive windfall on life insurance premiums. From memory, the amount was over \$600 million—it might have been \$603 million—in insurance premium windfall to stamp duty. Stamp duty on general insurance went up by over \$600 million. Using

any kind of rule-of-thumb calculation of the number of people in Western Australia who might have insurance and pay premiums it is certainly a big number. It would have significantly impacted that percentage change for the representative household. I do not want this issue skipped somehow in the next budget papers and the impact of that massive increase in insurance to be hidden. That has been a significant factor on the cost of living in Western Australia.

I would like us to start to move away from these one-off cash payments. I do not think they are a genuine, sustainable way to reduce the cost of living. All they do is say, “You get an electricity credit of \$400.” They are very badly targeted. People who just have an electricity connection get \$400. They might have a large family or a small family. They might have huge costs. The payment is not well targeted. The best thing the state government could do would be to reduce the impact of some of these underlying price rises on the people of Western Australia—we are seeking genuine, sustainable changes to the cost of living.

Point of Order

Hon TJORN SIBMA: There are a number of unruly interjections that might be quelled. I know government members are enthusiastic, probably overexcited. They are learning a lot but not responding well. If, Acting President, you could draw their attention to hearing the member in silence, I think it would do them well and the chamber an enormous good service.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): Thank you for the reminder. I have to point out that I can actually hear that quite well. I appreciate the point. I draw the attention of members to the fact that it would be wise to hear things in silence.

Debate Resumed

Hon NEIL THOMSON: In reference to the comment made by my honourable colleague —

Point of Order

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Acting President, I am not sure that you ruled on the point of order that was raised by the honourable member. I understand the advice you have given, perhaps you might tell us what your ruling is.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): Very well, there is no point of order. I thank you for the advice.

Debate Resumed

Hon NEIL THOMSON: It is getting confusing whether they are points of order or not. Anyhow, I will continue.

Hon Tjorn Sibma made a very good point that government members could just listen and learn because I have taken the time to work through a lot of detail. People would note that this is not just negative commentary; this is about detail within the budget papers. For the wellbeing of Western Australians, I would like to make sure that we have some long-term, sustainable change to cost-of-living pressures.

Not that long ago, I raised in this chamber the additional fee at the WA Museum, which is such an important facility. I would like to see more transparency on how these fees were introduced when they have such an impact on attendance. That is just a personal view. The problem is that the state invests billions of dollars into infrastructure, and some of it is very important cultural infrastructure like the Museum. The problem is that when we just want a few dollars of revenue, we reduce the overall benefits. It would be nice to see a bit more analysis done on these decisions and the merits to the overall community of a few extra dollars that go into the coffers of the state. So much ongoing benefit to the community could flow through some opportunities there. If the government wants some gratuitous suggestions, that might be something it could look at. I would be very delighted to support the Treasurer if that were to come through at the next budget. We will watch and see.

I have given a lot of advice to the Treasurer about how to structure the budget. As I said, we could see fewer of these one-off yearly cash handouts. If they are to be handed out, they should have some proper analysis so we know the long-term impacts. The expectation is given that this is an ongoing thing so I would rather see it honestly hardwired into the budget’s future projections so we know what the impact on debt will be, but obviously we need to do some of those structural changes and get on with the job that was promised way back in 2017 that has never been delivered.

In the closing moments of my speech, I want to recap on the fact that this is a tired, tired Cook Labor government that has no plan to fix the mess in our hospital system.

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This is a hospital system that we see year after year is on life support. How can it be that children have to wait two years to see a paediatrician? How can that be in Western Australia, the richest jurisdiction in Australia? Potentially,

if we were a nation on our own, we could be the richest jurisdiction in the world. This is a tired government with no plan to fix our housing affordability crisis. We always see these tiny little announcements that give a little bit of a bang; it is run by this whole media cycle. How can it be that we do not have a real plan to solve our housing crisis or our ailing and struggling school system? How can it be that we see in this state the worst crime statistics, particularly of violent crime, in Western Australia, the richest jurisdiction in the world?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Brian Walker): Hon Dan Caddy.

HON DAN CADDY (North Metropolitan) [5.20 pm]: Thank you, Acting President. Are you sure you have finished, member?

Hon Neil Thomson: I have!

Hon DAN CADDY: Okay; that is good.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Are you filibustering your own bill?

Hon DAN CADDY: Honourable member, I am looking forward to educating those of you on that side about exactly what this government is doing. There is a massive picture of what this government is doing. That is why I will be —

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

Hon DAN CADDY: Are you still here? That is why the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2024 intrigues me so. I will have immense pleasure in explaining to members opposite exactly what this government is doing— all the things the Cook government has done and is still doing. Let us be clear on risk, because right towards the end of the honourable member's speech he talked a bit about risk. As my extremely good lifelong friend Hon Pierre Yang said, members opposite are the greatest risk to this state. Members opposite being in government is the greatest risk that this state faces.

I will talk for a bit, and I will try to be balanced. I am going to cover a few areas because we are doing so much. I will talk about jobs and the cost of living. I will get to housing, police, health, law and order—there is a lot to talk about. There is a lot that this government is doing. I will talk about social policy, education and training and the economy. Obviously, I will touch on Metronet so that Hon Tjorn Sibma has something to interject on. He does like interjecting when we talk about Metronet and the environment, and also regional Western Australia.

Where am I going to start? Do you know what, I will start with Metronet because there is a lot to talk about. It has been in only the last couple of weeks that we have seen the arrival of the very first of the new C-series trains in use on the line. I am an avid —

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Imported from India! Assembled in WA!

Hon DAN CADDY: My friend, I remember when trains arrived when members opposite were in government, and they put a lick of paint on them —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! Jocularly is very much appropriate, but this is going too far. Hon Dan Caddy.

Hon DAN CADDY: Thank you for your guidance, Acting President. I remember when railcars arrived when members opposite were in government, they put a lick of paint on them, and what was the headline? It was "Two per cent local made." It was hilarious! It would be sad if it were not so funny, but I will get back to Metronet.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: Will you take an orderly interjection, member, just at this point?

Hon DAN CADDY: Only from you, member, and just this one.

Hon Tjorn Sibma: If you really want to substantiate your claims around local content, I think you might encourage the minister to actually table these mysterious participation plans, which actually codify how much local content has gone in. There are eight of them that the minister has refused to table so far. I am very happy if you're achieving what you say you are achieving. I just don't believe you, and I don't think anyone should believe you, either.

Hon DAN CADDY: I thank the member for his interjection. If those plans are not being tabled, there will be a very good reason for that being the case. The minister, the Treasurer and the Premier would know that reason, but it would be well above my pay grade, and I am very comfortable with that. But if the member wants to talk about local content, how about we look at the questions that were asked in this place today? There was a question I think from the honourable member to the minister representing the Minister for Transport. He was trying to infer in his question that some of the 160-plus employees out there were not actually Western Australians. The answer came back that as well as 162 full-time employees, the Metronet C-series railcar program is also supporting jobs at 15

local businesses across Western Australia supplying railcar components, and it indicated that most of the employees are actually Western Australian residents, with workers from overseas only ever used depending on specific skill requirements. The member may ask leading questions and infer a whole lot of things, but when the answer came back, I notice that he did not refer to it, because it is an answer he did not like, because it goes to exactly what I am saying.

Hon Neil Thomson: Will you take an orderly interjection?

Hon DAN CADDY: I might run out of time. I only have 40 minutes left!

Hon Martin Aldridge: We'll give you an extension!

Hon DAN CADDY: I appreciate that! I want to go back. I had not stopped telling members about this. I am an avid user of rail not just here, but when I have lived overseas. It is the only way to travel. I have been on the new C-series, and it is an exceptional locomotive—exceptional.

Hon Neil Thomson: Can you say, hand on heart, because I cannot see—I will check the modern slavery register.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Honourable member —

Hon DAN CADDY: Really? That sort of —

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Dan Caddy, I take great interest in hearing what you say, but you asked for interjections from one person only. Are you accepting interjections elsewhere?

Hon DAN CADDY: No, I do not think I will. I may well run out of time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: You will indeed.

Hon DAN CADDY: Thank you, Acting President, for your sage advice.

It is a fantastic new train. It was interesting. I remember being out there, getting on the train, there were people out there, the minister was actually out there as well, and a lot was said about rail infrastructure and infrastructure in general. One thing struck me, and it is something that I have said before, but probably not quite as eloquently. Having lived in many major cities around the world, as you have, Acting President, there are no great cities in the world that do not have great infrastructure. That is an absolute fact. It does not matter about the history of a city, where it is geographically, or when or how it was built; unless that city has great infrastructure, and part of that is great public transport infrastructure, it cannot be a great city.

I will go to the railcar procurement. I have a few notes here that I made some time ago, when I believe I spoke in this place about jobs and procurement and what we were doing with Metronet, bringing the building of railcars and that industry back to Australia. The reason I got up and spoke was I recalled being at a breakfast at which the former Leader of the Opposition said that it was—I may get her words wrong—a dead and dying industry, and why would we bring it back. I thought that epitomised everything we on this side need to know about what those on the other side think about these sorts of industries, and the importance of these industries in Western Australia. Another interesting thing I found is there is often an argument that there is a cost to local manufacturing when compared with overseas manufacturing. The cost per railcar of the last B-series was over \$4 million each; the cost of the new C-series under this contract was well below that.

As has been mentioned earlier today, the Bellevue plant is where Western Australia's biggest ever order of railcars is being built, tested, and will be maintained for decades to come. This is not just a shoot-up industry where we build these railcars and that is it.

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There is maintenance, future testing and training to go with them. Within what we are doing at that facility, there is the opportunity to train Western Australians in jobs that some of them will hold, if they choose to, probably their entire lives. It will serve as the permanent maintenance facility for the expanded Metronet fleet, and it will or possibly already does—I am not entirely sure—include a dedicated diesel railcar maintenance facility. As I said, we made the commitment to build railcars in Western Australia because we made a promise to the people of Western Australia that we would bring back railcar manufacturing after members opposite, when in government, closed the Midland railway workshops, and we are delivering on our promise. I know that I am going a bit back in history and I was very young, but the Liberal–National government closed the Fremantle rail line as well.

Here we go! I found it. The former opposition leader said that it was a failed manufacturing industry and a waste of money.

Hon Martin Aldridge: Who was that?

Hon DAN CADDY: That was Liza Harvey, in fact. I was not going to talk at length about Metronet because, as I pointed out to the Acting President, I do not want to run out of time, but what we are doing in that space in building infrastructure for Perth is unprecedented and absolutely possible only because of sound economic management. Let me tell members that WA deserves a government that builds the infrastructure that is needed for the future, and we can do that only because of our economic credentials. The two terms of this government—the McGowan and then Cook governments—have created more than 300 000 jobs since being elected, despite the pandemic. In my inaugural speech in this place, I remember standing up and talking about the approximately 80 000 jobs that had been created at that point. We still continue to create jobs in Western Australia. Before I was elected to this place, we passed the Western Australian Jobs Act, and that maximised opportunities for WA businesses on government projects. Obviously, the railcar manufacturing has helped. This government has a vision and has always stuck by its vision and not dropped it, unlike those opposite who dropped the Metro Area Express light rail and all that other stuff. We have continued to deliver the things that we said we would deliver. We have a proven track record of doing this, of doing what is right for all Western Australians and of creating and protecting Western Australian jobs.

Hon Neil Thomson mentioned the cost of living, and I was surprised to hear him say that. This government has delivered at least \$1 400 in electricity credits to Western Australian households over the time.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon DAN CADDY: I heard the honourable member when he spoke. He does not need interject, because I heard him say that it is not something he would have done to relieve the pain and pressure felt by Western Australian families. That is what I heard him say. If I am wrong, I am happy to read *Hansard* and be corrected. We have made travel in our suburbs cheaper through the two-zone fare cap, which also helps people who are struggling with the cost of living. A couple of members spoke about the regional airfare caps earlier. Hon Peter Foster went to town about that earlier today, and I believe Hon Shelley Payne also spoke about how regional airfare caps make airfares more affordable for regional Western Australians.

Obviously, there is also the rent relief program to help with the cost of living. Why do we do it? Because WA deserves a government that is prepared to help when times are tough, and that is what Western Australians have in the Cook Labor government.

I will talk a little bit about police, and law and order. This morning, my good friend Hon Peter Collier, Hon Samantha Rowe and I —

Hon Stephen Dawson: What's with the love energy?

Hon DAN CADDY: There are a lot of good friends in this place, Deputy Leader of the House. We spent time with senior members of the Western Australia Police Force, and we talked at length about its last annual report. This government has opened the new state operations centre, which provides enhanced management and tactical intelligence and a genuinely improved technical capability to support frontline officers and agency staff, not just in Perth but also right across the state. We introduced and extended Operation Heat Shield and Operation Regional Shield. I asked at our meeting this morning where things were at with Operation Regional Shield. It continues to deliver. The Deputy Commissioner of Police said to me that it continues to deliver and is a fantastic program.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon DAN CADDY: Once again, member, these sorts of programs and the funding for these programs are only possible because of the sound fiscal management of the Cook government. I know that is a bitter pill for him to swallow, but that is the truth. That is why we can afford to roll out these programs.

I give a shout-out to all police officers out there, and I am sure that all members will agree with me. I give a shout-out to everyone from Col Blanch to the new recruits and those in the academy, and not just to them but also to the many public servants who are not sworn police officers but work in that area, such as intelligence analysts. I give a shout-out to them for the very important job they do to keep Western Australians safe.

I will pick a few pages from the *Western Australia Police Force annual report 2023* because we have done a couple of really important things with police in just the last 12 months. To put it in perspective, we have to remember that—if I am not wrong—Western Australia, at over 2.6 million square kilometres, is the largest policing jurisdiction in the world. What makes that even more difficult is that 80 per cent of the state's population lives in less than one per cent of that area. Police have real constraints to how they can operate.

This morning, I touched on one of the silver linings that has come out of the COVID pandemic, and that is the border search areas. There has been some negativity about them and what they have achieved. What specifically has been achieved at the border search areas? I was fascinated to listen to the Commissioner of Police as he explained how important the new laws and border search areas are. It is not about what happens specifically at the

border search areas; it is about the flow-on effects that disrupt criminal organisations. Once we understand the reasons we have set up these areas and their success in the disruption of what I would call, in my words, the criminal supply chains, we understand how important it is to properly fund police to do that work. Once again, this comes from sound financial management.

Earlier, I mentioned the new state operations centre. Technical innovation is really important to the police force, and the Western Australia Police Force has partnered with the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission and the Department of Home Affairs to develop a national criminal intelligence system to provide law enforcement agencies with a more comprehensive view of organised crime and organised crime activity right across Australia. Once again, these are great things that will not happen and cannot happen unless we have sound financial management. If the government is in a good place and the state is in a good place, these are the sorts of innovative things that flow from that.

It is not just that; it is also about police equipment and police stations. Hon Samantha Rowe and I were talking about the new station that is being built at Baldivis, I think. As a government, we continue to build new police stations and to refurbish existing police stations.

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It is not just the stations; it is also about providing vehicles that are technologically enabled to give our officers simple and fast access to real-time criminal information. That helps to not only apprehend criminals, but also protect our officers. This government is investing in the Western Australia Police Force through investing in not only police stations, but also technology. We did not talk about police helicopters this morning, but I am aware that the police have two new Airbus helicopters. Once again, that is a pretty major investment for the state police force. That is possible only because of the good economic management of this government. The people of Western Australia deserve a government that recognises how important our police force is and that provides it with the latest equipment and technology. That is what this Cook government is delivering. It is not just that; it is programs as well. I will not speak at length about them because I have spoken before in this place about the fantastic work of the police and community youth centres. They are right across the state. There are more of them in the regional areas than in the metropolitan area. They are a fantastic front line for the youth in Western Australia. I have a page on Operation Regional Shield, which I have already spoken about.

Another thing the government recognises is the importance of high-visibility policing and the importance of our police officers spending as much time as possible in the community. High-visibility policing is the number one strategy to deter offending. We also have officers on the ground wherever they happen to be, so we have real-time intelligence coming in. We can then put officers in place where the intelligence says they need to be to target and deter offending and those sorts of things. I am pleased to say that I noticed in the police annual report that the percentage of sworn officers available for frontline policing is at 69 per cent. That is very impressive. Another thing I noticed, which impressed me a lot and is an increase on last year, is that the population of Western Australia is somewhere just below three million and the number of traffic breath alcohol tests was over two million. That is outstanding work getting done right across the community. The police who are out there doing what we call RBTs—random breath tests—are amazing. A few years ago I was in Albany and fortunately I was driving a LandCruiser because the police officer who stopped me for the RBT was on horseback. She had to lean over her horse to administer the test to get me to blow through the little pipe. I asked her what she would have done if I was driving a Ferrari. She looked down the road and pointed to a whole lot of her colleagues in police cars. It was interesting to be stopped by a police officer on horseback on York Street in Albany and asked to blow into the bag, as they say.

Hon Darren West: What was the name of the horse? I think it was Trigger!

Hon DAN CADDY: I do not know the name of the horse or the officer, but she was very nice. I felt a bit bad because I asked her whether I could take a photo. I was stopped at the time. It was a good laugh. I have laughed about it with many friends since.

While I am talking about police, I also want to talk about the Road Safety Commission and the road trauma trust account, but I will probably run out of time because I want to get to quite a few other things. However, I want to outline the fantastic work that has been done there. All modern societies deal with road trauma. We have a fantastic commissioner in Adrian Warner. He is absolutely passionate about road safety. I saw an article recently, I believe in *The West Australian*, in which he lamented the number of motorcycle accidents we have. He made a very valid point that a lot of the motorcycle accidents that are occurring these days, to use his words, involve older riders. I am in that category. As someone who has ridden motorbikes my whole life and gone through the whole gamut of sports bikes and who now rides cruisers, I am very well aware of the vulnerability of motorcyclists. We used to say that if we got to 40, we were good, because I had friends who lost their lives when I was young. Motorcycle accidents are predominantly seen as a young man's issue, but that is not always the case. Adrian Warner is very

passionate. I am not sure whether he was writing about it or they were comments in an article in *The West Australian*, but the Road Safety Commission has run some fantastic education campaigns, and those campaigns make a significant difference.

What else did I say I would talk about? I will talk about social policy and the amount of money we are putting into homelessness and the outstanding work that has been done by Minister Carey. On Wednesday, 3 April, if I remember my diary correctly, I was in Joondalup. I was fortunate to walk about three minutes from my office to see Uniting WA's new offices. I was there to present a grant on behalf of Minister Winton. That gave me a chance to speak to the CEOs, Jen and Michael, whom I have met on a number of occasions. We went through the new offices, which are fantastic. A lot of the workers are outreach workers so there were not as many workers there then as there may have been at the start of the day. The grant we gave them was to help support vulnerable Western Australians who could use the money for the provision of food, bill payments, fuel, clothing vouchers and the like. The Cook government has always been very clear that we will always support community sector organisations, whether it is through direct grants or through Lotterywest community grants programs, and help build a better Western Australia. WA deserves a government that has that type of empathy and compassion. We, as a government, and certainly the Premier, recognise the impacts of the cost of living and that many Western Australians are doing it tough. We had a pretty substantial conversation at the end. I sat down with Jenny, who is a teen facilitator, and Marlene, who is one of the emergency relief officers. I sat there for probably about 45 minutes and listened to their accounts of not what they are dealing with, but what the people they are helping are dealing with, which was harrowing. It is super important for this government to put money towards helping those people when we can.

While I am talking about Uniting WA, I will also quickly take the opportunity to outline a fantastic program it launched last year, which is The Together Program. That program is a collaboration between Uniting WA and Homeless Healthcare. I had a long chat with one of the co-CEOs, Michael Chester, about this program around the time it was launched. From memory, that was in November last year. It is an innovative three-year pilot program to support pregnant women who are at risk of experiencing homelessness. It is designed to provide mothers with a safe and nurturing environment and a comprehensive support system during the first key years of their child's life.

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That support includes stable and affordable housing for up to 12 months with a real focus on tenancy management and wraparound supports tailored to unique needs that some mothers and babies have—essential medical and health support that is coordinated by Homeless Healthcare. I also give a shout-out to the University of Notre Dame's Home2Health team that is doing the research and program evaluation that goes along with this pilot. The Together program is aligned with strategy 3 of the sustainable health review, which states that a focus on support during pregnancy and the baby's first 1 000 days of life will see children and families achieve the best start in life to become physically and mentally healthy adults. This program aligns also with *All paths lead to a home: Western Australia's 10-year strategy on homelessness 2020–2030*. There is a low barrier and very innovative service conceived through a whole-of-community approach. Specifically, having been on the homelessness inquiry, I point out that recommendation 45 of the inquiry into the financial administration of homelessness services in Western Australia encouraged the allocation of funding for crisis and supported accommodation for pregnant women and mothers with newborns experiencing or at risk of homelessness. I remember when I was sitting there with Michael that he told me that this would make a truly significant impact on the lives of vulnerable women in Western Australia—that it is able to help and would absolutely demonstrate, without a doubt, the power of early intervention. This is a fantastic program. Once again, I give a shout-out to all the people involved. I cannot list all the similar organisations, but to all those doing work within those organisations, what a fantastic job they do.

I return to my list that I said at the start I would talk about. The economy: the McGowan government and now Cook government has returned the fair share of GST to Western Australia. We regained our AAA credit rating, which was lost under the previous Liberal government. We have delivered consistently strong economic growth. We are now seven years into this government and it has not stopped. We will put a record \$44 billion into infrastructure over the next four years, delivering jobs and benefiting all Western Australians for generations to come. At the same time, we will reduce debt. We are diversifying the WA economy. I have already spoken at length about railcar manufacturing coming back in-house. Members spoke in this place for a couple of hours today about tourism so I will not go over that again. I mention international education and defence industries. Defence industries is a massive opportunity for this state. Minister Papalia and Premier Cook have been at the forefront of making sure we get everything we can out of what is happening at the moment in defence industries for this government. When it comes to our economy, WA deserves a government with the strength and the smarts to defend our GST.

Education and training: I was chatting with the Minister for Education just the other day. In partnership with the Albanese government we are boosting funding to public schools in Western Australia by \$1.6 billion. We have partnered to deliver 130 fee-free TAFE courses across a range of key industries, and 160 high-priority courses have had their fees reduced by up to 72 per cent through the government's Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative. As a government we are investing in the biggest TAFE capital works program in Western Australian history, with 15 major upgrades at TAFEs across the state to create world-class learning facilities.

Hon Ben Dawkins interjected.

Hon DAN CADDY: I am not taking interjections from you.

Since 2017, we have delivered 32 new primary schools and nine new secondary schools, and there are more on the way. We have absolutely delivered in education for Western Australians. As well as that, we are upgrading and refurbishing schools across Western Australia with early childhood learning facilities, performing arts centres, sports halls and over 330 new science labs to prepare our young Western Australians for the jobs of the future. We are investing heavily in education and training, which is an investment in the future of our young people and in the future of this state. Western Australia deserves a government that continually invests in education and in the future of this state.

The environment: we have committed to net zero by 2050 and to making it law. We are unapologetic for this: we are retiring state-owned coal-fired power stations and will reduce state government carbon emissions by 80 per cent by 2030. We are implementing the nation-leading Plan for Plastics initiative, which will phase out single-use plastics, and we ended the logging of our magnificent south west forests because WA deserves a government that cares about the environment and our children's future. I could go on and on but I know that other members wish to speak, so I shall take my seat and let someone else contribute.

HON MARTIN PRITCHARD (North Metropolitan) [5.56 pm]: The Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2024 is a fairly short bill, but usually during these types of debates, a fair bit of latitude is given with regard to the content. As I get into my contribution, I will take advantage of that with your guidance, President.

Before I do that, I want to make a comment. I have been in this place now since 2015 and through most of that I can remember making an unruly interjection once—I think. Yesterday I made two unruly interjections during the contribution of the shadow Treasurer. The reason I did that was just sheer frustration. The shadow Treasurer was not not telling the truth, but was asserting things that would give a normal constituent reason to believe that this government was to blame for the debt we have—and that simply is not true. I was here during the latter part of the Barnett government. I think Premier Barnett did some good things. I was a big proponent of maintaining the football ground at Subiaco Oval, and I argued that strongly. However, the decision to move it to Burswood has ultimately been an extremely good decision. Unfortunately, it had some effects on Subiaco, and that is the reason I was opposed to it; small business around that area has suffered greatly. Ultimately the decision was great, so I do not say that when Colin Barnett was Premier he did all things bad. I thought his fighting to maintain the level of gambling in this state was very good. However, to suggest that he was a good Treasurer or managed the finances of this state is laughable. The previous Treasurer, Hon Eric Ripper, left Western Australia in what most would suggest was a pretty good state. Debt was around \$3 billion but was very manageable. Both sides of Parliament would suggest that he was a good Treasurer.

When Colin Barnett won the 2008 election—I was not here at the time but I know about it and I think the shadow Treasurer should know about it—he took a debt for this state of about \$3 billion and increased it to somewhere in the region of \$37 billion.

<031> S/G

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: I know, because I debated the bills that came before this place seeking additional funds.

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: I am not taking interjections, thank you. I do listen to the honourable member quietly, except for those two times yesterday, so I would appreciate similar respect. If my figures are incorrect, members have every opportunity at some point to correct me.

I believe the Barnett government took the debt in this state from about \$3 billion to around \$37 billion. One of the things the shadow Treasurer said yesterday is that we have a very big interest bill—and we do. We had \$30-odd billion worth of debt delivered to us by the Barnett government. When a new government takes over, it does not take over a clean sheet. We do not say, "That is Colin's debt." It is not; it is the government's debt. When we take over the seats on the government's side of the chamber, we do our best. Since that time, I think the Treasurer has

managed the finance of this state extremely well. During this time I often made references to how I understand debt, accounting and such with regard to home accounting. When I was young—I think I was 18—the bank card came out and I thought it was the best thing since sliced bread. I used to go to the automatic teller machine and pull out another 20 bucks to get some more beer. I did that every time, and I think my debt at that time—I am going back a few years—got into the region of about \$3 000. It was impossible for me to pay back. I could not keep on top of the amount of interest I had to pay, as well as paying down the principal. I ended up having to get a loan, and it took a long period of time to repay that money. I cut up the bank card. When a new government takes over the debt, it has to service the interest on that debt, and that was one of the Barnett government's legacies. Again, I balance that by saying he did some good things too. He built some infrastructure, but spending was not one of the good things. People within government at that time knew what he was like with spending because he did the same when he was the Minister for Education; he loved to spend. That was the legacy that he left to this government to tidy up, and I think we have done a very good job of it.

I mentioned that I wanted to take a bit of latitude and talk about something else. The second reading speech on this bill mentioned that some additional money was going towards health, so I want to talk about health very briefly on a very personal basis. I will preface this by saying that when we debated the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill, I made some comments about general practitioners, and many general practitioners around the country hauled me over the coals. The comment I made was that they do not all keep up to date. The ones who hauled me over the coals—it was not on Teams, but one of the other platforms—obviously care very deeply and kept up to date and would be the *crème de la crème* of general practitioners. I still maintain the view that not all general practitioners stay completely up to date and we would not expect them to. Like the general population, they are only human, so I preface what I will say with that. My wife had a heart attack 20 years ago. The symptoms came in the form of reflux. We went down to the general practitioner. We could not see her normal doctor because he was away, so we saw one of the relief doctors, who said, “No you have got some reflux. Go home, take Mylanta or whatever, fix yourself up.” We went home that night, and she had a pretty bad night. We went back to the doctor in the morning, and the doctor said it will settle down. We ended up going to the emergency department at the Joondalup Health Campus a while later, but it was too late to be dealt with properly and so she has a damaged heart. We could say that that was the doctor's fault, but it was not, really. I think the doctor may have even said if we were really worried we should go to the emergency department. However, we did not, so we have to take some of the blame for that, and I accept that.

I have a good news story for health. A lot of people come to the fore when they are concerned about the treatment that they have had. The ones who get good treatment are not going to go to the papers, and the papers probably will not print it anyway because it is a good news story, and the papers are looking for conflict. If we had gone there 20 years ago, the papers might have printed it because they said it was all the doctor's fault and we should sue the doctor; all that sort of stuff. A few weeks ago on the 4 March public holiday, my wife had a conscious VT. Hon Dr Brian Walker will know what that is.

Hon Dr Brian Walker: Ventricular tachycardia.

Hon MARTIN PRITCHARD: That is why I say VT!

She had a conscious VT, which happened when we had the grandkids over. I was with her and what do you do? I rang the ambulance. Within 12 minutes, I had two particularly good paramedics in the bedroom looking after her. On the 4 March public holiday, they were inside 12 minutes later. During that time, the person stayed on the phone with me to talk me through it and make sure I did not panic. The paramedics got there and assessed her. They initially took her up to Joondalup, and then to Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital because it had a particular unit that looked after the heart and such. By the time I got to Charlie Gardiner, they had assessed her and sorted her out. That afternoon, they checked to make sure everything was fine, that the arteries were not blocked and that she was not having another heart attack. They determined that there was a blocked artery, but it was an old blockage, so they were not going to do anything about it because the heart had sorted itself out. She now has a defibrillator. That operation was on a Monday, and by Thursday lunchtime she was out and back at home.

The reason I tell that story is that there are always problems with health. There are always problems with education. No matter how much money the government throws at these things, situations will always come up. Although I am part of the government, I do not have a decision-making role within it, but I believe this government has its priorities right and is doing everything it can to fix the issues that we have. The opposition obviously has a role to try to disrupt, but I think that it is important that it is able to disrupt and take ownership of its history as well.

This is a good news story about health. There will be hundreds of stories that are not quite so good. Hopefully this good news story balances that a little bit. When someone needs the health system in this state—there may be mistakes made because people are human—I would rather be in Western Australia than anywhere else in the world. For what little credit the government can take—it basically sets the policies and such—the people who work there do the best they can. It will not be solved by sending more and more money at it. There will be mistakes, but I

congratulate the minister on the policy decisions that this government makes in health. I think she is doing an extremely good job and this is a particularly good story that I wanted to tell.

<032> P/2

I wanted to particularly thank those two, because St John's has obviously had a bit of a rough time over the last little while. I tried to find out who the paramedics were, but St John's has a policy in which it does not put out that information. I publicly want to thank those two because they saved my wife's life. Apparently, there were some situations in the ambulance on the way to Joondalup. I can quite truthfully say they saved her life. She is a lot better now. The treatment that we received was efficient and quick. All the people involved were not just caring of her medical situation, but of how she felt as well. They reported to me on an ongoing basis, so I was not left in the dark. I want to thank those two paramedics and St John's. I want to thank the Joondalup emergency department as well as the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital coroner unit and ward 401. Everything there was extremely good and she is healthy. I am thankful for that.

We have a short bill here that deals with finances. I do not think there should be any queries about the way in which the Treasurer and Treasury are dealing with the issues of this state. I think she is doing a marvellous job. There particularly should not be any queries raised by the opposition, because it is not on solid ground. The shadow Treasurer may not have been there at the time, and I understand that, but being shadow Treasurer, I would expect him to know the history. He probably knows it better than me. If he does not know the figures better than me, then what he said yesterday was at the very least misleading. He knows how debt works in this state. The interest on the debt is a problem, but it is not a problem of this government's making, it is a problem of the previous government, and this government is doing everything it can to remedy it. He should be cautious in how he puts things. As I said, it is not often that I want to interject. I did yesterday. I will try to contain myself for the following year that I will be here.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.12 pm]: I would also like to make a few comments about the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2024. I was prompted to do so by the contribution by the shadow Treasurer. I sat here in disbelief and at times mirth at that contribution. All I can say is that I hope there is an alternative to the alternative Treasurer. That would be a disaster for Western Australia.

I have a benefit that previous speakers do not in that I was in this place during the Barnett Liberal–National government years. Hon Dan Caddy was a staffer at that time and was here as well. We had the best seat in the house, if you like, to see how not to financially manage a government. It was fiscal carnage. It was absolutely disastrous.

Hon Kate Doust: That is being polite.

Hon DARREN WEST: I am being polite member, thank you. This is the Legislative Council. Of course we are polite in here.

It was an absolute debacle. We would sit there in the opposition benches and just shake our heads at the decisions of the government that made no sense and duly delivered deficit after deficit. There was infighting and \$1 billion was being spent annually outside of Treasury processes. What could possibly go wrong? That is what we sat back and watched. We watched the government spend \$300 million on refurbishing coal-fired power stations in Collie to then not use them. We saw around \$800 million spent to transfer year 7s from primary to high school—a decision that has decimated many of our regional communities. It was one of the worst government decisions that I have ever seen that I rallied against.

Hon Peter Collier: No.

Hon DARREN WEST: I did rally hard against it, member. I did! I tabled a petition with 4 000 signatures that was totally ignored by the Barnett government.

That decision offered no educational advantages, decimated our regional communities and was too expensive. That was the kind of decision-making that we sat back and watched in our time in opposition. There were seven Treasurers in seven years at one point. Hon Ben Wyatt, who went on to become Treasurer, coined the phrase "Colin Barnett and the Seven Treasurers." I think members can get some idea of what a chaotic grabble the then government was at the time. I do not think there is any doubt anywhere that this was the worst financially managed government not only in Western Australian history, but I think you could say in Australian history.

I remember when Western Australia was doing okay early in Colin Barnett's premiership that Tasmania was at the bottom of the table in the State of The States and he said that he would go to assist Tasmania with its financial management when he retired from politics. I am quite sure that he never got a call from the government of Tasmania, because when he left office, Western Australia was ranked eighth in the Commonwealth Bank State of

the States. That is where we deserved to be. We were a mess. We had eight deficits and debt from \$3.8 billion to a projection of \$44 billion. The spending was just out of control.

Let us not let the National Party off the hook in this either, because its members were running around like drunken sailors trying to buy votes with taxpayer money—\$1 billion a year. Let us not forget about them. Spending was increasing by 13 per cent a year—the Liberal–National government and its spending increase. Again, what could possibly go wrong? Well, it did go wrong. The iron ore price corrected. As Hon Dr Steve Thomas often reminds us, these booms do not last forever. The iron ore price corrected, and the government floundered.

Then it put assets up for sale. That was the first thing. It was a distressed seller in an oppressed market trying to flog off state government assets, such as Western Power. That was its go-to position. It had no mechanism to reverse the carnage that it enforced on the Western Australian taxpayer. There is one thing I will agree with that Hon Neil Thomson said, but it is the only thing: this is taxpayers' money. What we saw between 2008–2017 was a government that had no consideration for the fact that this money was taxpayers' money.

It was difficult to sit back and watch, but we did. When we watched this deplorable financial management, we actually learned. As an opposition, we were able to find out what not to do, how not to manage the economy and how we could do things better. Of course, on coming into government, Hon Ben Wyatt became the Treasurer. I think he is the equal best Treasurer in Western Australian history with Hon Eric Ripper. We turned things around. We have run a budget surplus ever since. We are the only state —

Hon Neil Thomson interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: Member, I am not taking interjections at 6.19 pm. We turned things around. We have now run a surplus in every budget that we have delivered. We are the only state in Australia reducing debt. We kept Western Australians safe, our mining industry going and our economy strong during the COVID pandemic. We are rightfully proud of that. Of course, when the shadow Treasurer gets up and makes the comments that he did earlier, we in government are going to refute everything he says, and, more importantly, so are the taxpayers of Western Australia. They know it. They know who managed their finances better and who federally is managing their finances better. This tired old myth that only the Liberals can manage money has been absolutely busted in the last few years, as the records show.

In a few weeks, the state government will deliver the budget. We are getting a taste of things to come in the 2024–25 budget. For example, the Minister for Emergency Services has allocated over \$70 million to our fire services. There will be extra fires. We know that climate change is changing the way that we manage fire outbreaks. Fires are getting more serious and harder to deal with.

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They are the sorts of things that are important to us as government because they are important to the taxpayers of Western Australia. This is a wise spend of taxpayers' money. That is not something we saw during the Barnett Liberal–National government years.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.