

**HANSARD 26 MAY 2010**  
**BUDGET SPEECHES**

**DR M.D. NAHAN (Riverton)** [9.24 pm]: This is an excellent budget. It is a budget for the times. It provides stability during uncertain times, and these are very uncertain times. The global financial crisis has certainly not passed us by. It is a time when governments do not take radical action; they provide stability in periods of uncertainty.

The budget builds for the future. It delivers services in a targeted way and begins the process of reforming the service delivery in government. The budget delivers a small budget surplus of \$290 million, but a budget surplus.

It delivers that with very slight revenue growth. Revenue growth over the next year is scheduled to be 3.85 per cent, which is slightly above the inflation rate. It delivers a budget surplus with no new taxes or tax increases. In fact, it provides a \$100 million rebate of payroll tax in the next few months. It delivers a record capital spend of \$7.6 billion over the next year, which represents a 40 per cent increase in capital budgets compared with the last Labor budget—that is, the 2008–09 budget of the previous Labor government.

Over the next four years, the capital spend for water is scheduled to be \$3.4 billion; for hospitals \$3.5 billion; for schools \$1.9 billion; and for public safety \$640 million. That is a massive level of investment, and a record level in Western Australian history.

My electorate of Riverton is characterised by a few factors. One is that the heart of the electorate is indeed its public schools—specifically its senior public schools. That is why people move there, and that is why people are continuing to move there. It has two of the largest and finest high schools in the state—Rossmoyne Senior High School and Willetton Senior High School, and Lynwood High School is catching up quickly.

One of the things that these schools had been demanding, requesting and pleading for was a greater degree of independence from the education department. They wanted to tailor-make their services to the demands of the kids they serve and the family and community within which they operate.

They had been getting nowhere until the Liberal–National government came into power and provided one of the most popular programs in my electorate—that is, the independent public schools.

The independent public school process started last year when 34 schools were selected, including Rossmoyne Senior High School. That school is absolutely thrilled with this reform process. The tenders are out for the next wave, and both Willetton Senior High School and Lynwood Senior High School are applicants for that. This budget allocates \$19.3 million over the next five years to assist schools to flesh out and invest in becoming independent public schools.

My electorate is also characterised by a high degree of migrants, particularly from various countries in Asia, including South Asia. They are drawn to the electorate for a number of reasons—affordable housing, excellent schools and, of course, its multicultural nature. But with a multicultural population comes special demands, including special needs in English.

Many of the migrants—at least their children—struggle with English; English is their second language. This budget allocates—I am particularly pleased with this because it is something that I advocated for repeatedly—additional money to help students with English difficulties from 457 visa families.

In the past this should, of course, have been a commonwealth responsibility; 457 visas come under a commonwealth program. But when 457 visa kids with English difficulties go to schools, there is no additional money for them.

The schools provide the education and provide the services, but they have no money for the kids and for their special English needs. This budget allocates \$13.9 million over two years for this. The schools in Riverton will be thrilled.

A program which was initiated last year but which is continuing this year is the Integrated Services Centre at Parkwood Primary School. That is a program particularly for refugee students living in and around the electorate who have been traumatised but who have special English and other needs.

The Integrated Services Centre commenced a few years ago but was only funded on a year-to-year basis. The Liberal–National government came in and provided stable funding to run the program.

The budget provides additional funding for education. A major issue in education has been the move to a half-cohort for year 8 as students move from primary school to high school. That has led to disruption in high schools and also less students flowing through from year 8 to year 12. It was a major source of disruption. This budget provides \$22 million over the next four years to help adjust to the half-cohort.

Importantly, this budget recognises the difficulties of curriculum change. All of us will remember the outcomes-based education disaster of the previous government. It imposed on schools a harebrained new curriculum, which was like sending a virus into the software of schools. We have to adapt to the implementation of a national curriculum.

It is not an OBE, it is much more rational, but it will impose implementation issues, and costs on schools. This budget allocates \$5 million for the implementation of the national curriculum. This budget also continues with the \$14 million upgrade of Rossmoyne Senior High School in starting out its second phase expansion.

One of the most important facilities in the Riverton area is the St John Ambulance facility and depot. This budget allocates \$150 million over the next four years for new and expanded ambulance services, including at Riverton.

It also allocates \$50 million over four years for community child health services. One of the issues in the electorate of Riverton is the rapid growth in young families brought in by the schools, but, in so doing, the demand for community health services has increased.

One of the most important infrastructure issues facing Riverton is the continuation of Roe Highway. It was the most controversial issue at the last election. The continuation of Roe Highway and our promise to commit to it is the single most important reason for me being in this house. Last budget, the government committed to extend Roe Highway—called the Roe Highway extension—and allocated \$20 million over three years for its planning, design and community consultation process.

This budget continues to fund its planning. It will be a challenge. The Labor opposition is committed to preventing the road being completed. It has lobbied the commonwealth government to the point that the Rudd government has now, I understand, withdrawn funding for it. The Labor opposition's action of course has withdrawn from this state over \$200 million in funding that would otherwise have come to us for essential road construction.

The Liberal–National government has committed to this; and, if necessary, will find the money necessary from other sources, particularly in the road budget. We will build the Roe extension. I must emphasise that the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Cannington and the member for Gosnells have all sworn to resist the road. The Labor Party will be held accountable for its actions at the next election in Riverton.

**Mr J.E. McGrath:** Where are all the opposition members?

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** I might add that I have sat here and listened to a number of speeches all day by the opposition, and only one opposition member is in the chamber.

**Mr F.A. Alban:** The comedian has gone and all the audience went with him!

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** Utility increases—one of the most difficult issues in this budget of course was the increases in electricity; particularly electricity and water charges. Electricity charges went up by 7.5 per cent in April and they are scheduled to go up by another 10 per cent in July this year. This is by necessity because of the legacy of our inheritance.

The previous Labor government kept electricity prices constant for eight years. That was during a period of time when the cost of fuel—whether it be gas, coal or oil—went up manyfold.

As a result the various energy producers and suppliers were haemorrhaging. At one time they were subsidising Verve Energy to the tune of \$1 million a week. The previous government received a report in mid-2008 from the independent assessor, the Economic Regulation Authority, that recommended a 72 per cent increase in the price of electricity, and that, going forward, the electricity industry was facing huge losses.

We, the Liberal–National government, committed to move towards more cost-reflective pricing. In a resource-constrained world, in a world moving to adjust to climate change, one cannot continue to hugely subsidise energy consumption. The question is: how rapidly does one move? We moved last year, and we moved this year—17 per cent this year. There will be some movement, but the Premier has indicated quite clearly that most of it has been done.

As to water, as I indicated before we have a record capital spend on water—\$3.4 billion over four years. Included in that figure is the second desalination plant, which will cost around \$1 billion.

The previous government, I think rightly, put in place and committed to a wide-ranging capital spend on water, sewerage and other facilities. We continue that, not only with completing the second desalination plant but also \$100 million for the infill sewerage program.

If the government spends the money, it increases the costs. Desalination plants and the provision of water is hugely expensive.

It is manyfold more costly than capturing water from dams. The previous government committed to it, and we support it. It will lead to very high increases in costs, which will equate to cost-reflective tariffs.

This budget put in place increases in water charges to the average household in the vicinity of 17 per cent. It has also increased hardship assistance for those people struggling to pay. We recognise that this will particularly affect families with large backyards or large lawns, or gardeners—low-income earners, particularly self-funded retirees. Again, it is a necessity to have cost-reflective prices when we move to a resource-scarce world.

The budget also allocates \$26.8 million to the popular WA Seniors Card for the cost-of-living rebate. This is a Liberal government initiative to help seniors meet the increased costs and also recognition of the contribution that seniors have made to society.

These funds, which are indexed to the consumer price index, will be \$104.80 for singles and \$157 for couples. It will be paid directly to senior cardholders' bank accounts from July.

The people of Riverton will be pleased—they have a stable government; record capital investment; large investment in their most precious public asset, schools; large investments in the adjacent Fiona Stanley Hospital and the ambulance services; and slow and steady recognition of the need to start living in a resource-constrained world. I recommend the budget to everybody and support it fully.