



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Public Interest Debate

7 June 2022

NEW SOUTH WALES WORKERS WAGE INCREASE

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (17:18):

I thank all our hardworking teachers and nurses and all our public sector workers in New South Wales and I say to them that they deserve more.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will be heard in silence.

Ms SONIA HORNER: Workers have felt the impacts of COVID lockdowns, furloughing and the challenges of working from home. Our community rose to the challenges time and time again, and I thank them for that. In 2020 though, the New South Wales Government dealt a massive blow to our public sector workers by freezing wages. Ten years ago I spoke in Parliament about the Liberal Government capping public sector wages at 2.5 per cent. I argued then that our public sector deserved better—and it still does. When I was a teacher and we were fighting for wage increases, we knew that going to the Industrial Relations Commission led to a frank, fair and balanced outcome for both the government and the workers. But this Government took away the power and scrutiny of the Industrial Relations Commission and as a result did a disservice to the hardworking public sector workers across New South Wales.

This week the Government announced it was increasing the wages cap from 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent. With inflation at more than 5 per cent, petrol at \$2 a litre, electricity prices through the roof and the Reserve Bank increasing interest rates today by 50 basis points, 3 per cent does not cut it. This continued wage capping policy represents real cuts in wages for nurses, teachers and other public servants. As a teacher who started in the bush, I ask Government members: With a promise of a 3

per cent wage rise, what incentive does a young person have to go to university to become a teacher or a nurse and then be sent to be school or a hospital in an isolated and distant town like Walgett, eight hours away from where they grew up?

Is that the Government's big incentive to teach or nurse in Walgett? Remember that it is the teachers, the nurses and the police officers who put the money into the businesses in Walgett too. Every time public sector workers get a wage rise, they buy houses when they can afford to. They live in country towns and they contribute to the community and the small businesses. Earlier today I spoke with a local nurse at John Hunter Hospital. She thanked me for not posting on my social media channels, which members know are pretty busy, about the proposed wage increase. She told me very passionately:

None of this addresses the systemic issues we are facing daily. The 3%, which is really only half a percent, given we were already supposed to be getting 2.5 doesn't even make up for the pay cuts and freezes we were subjected to during the pandemic.

As for the \$3,000 one-off payment, its only for permanent staff, so contracted and casual workers won't get it, despite working huge hours throughout the pandemic.

And what about all the other frontline workers including first responders who protected us during the COVID pandemic, why are they missing out on the payment?

This policy is wrong and the Government must rethink it. The current New South Wales bargaining system is out of date. We need a system that strikes a fairer balance and is affordable for our working-class people, particularly those on lower wages. We can do better. We need an independent industrial relations system that delivers real wage growth over time for the workforce and world-class services for the public. I will continue, as I have for the past 16 years, to support the hardworking teachers, nurses and public sector workers in our community. I always have done and always will.