

STATE ECONOMY — 2020–21 STATE BUDGET

802. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Premier:

On behalf of the member for Southern River, I would like to acknowledge the student councillors from Caladenia Primary School who are in the Speaker's gallery today.

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's determination in keeping Western Australia safe and strong. Can the Premier outline to the house how this government's strong response to COVID-19 is supporting our economy and helping create jobs, and can the Premier advise the house how the state budget handed down last week will continue to support Western Australians, particularly young Western Australians, in finding work?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Bicton for the question. Today's job figures are a credit to all Western Australians and Western Australian businesses and to the Western Australian workforce. It is a credit to their response to COVID-19 and their hard work in following the rules that have been put in place. It has allowed the Western Australian economy to be more open and free and to have a greater degree of liberalisation than any other economy in Australia. Indeed, on many economic indicators, Western Australia is now in a better position than when we arrived in government. Today's job figures show that there are now 49 500 more Western Australians in work than when we came to government. As we know, when we came to government, the last government had the state in recession. The state is not in recession, even though we are in a once-in-a-hundred-years pandemic. Since the height of the pandemic back in April and May, 75 900 jobs have been recovered. The unemployment rate is currently at 6.7 per cent, which is the lowest of all states. That is a great achievement by the people of this state. When the last government was in office, without a pandemic, unemployment hit 6.6 per cent in Western Australia. The youth unemployment rate is lower than when we came to government in Western Australia. As we know, the unemployment rate in February was 5.2 per cent—the lowest it had been since May 2015 and the third lowest unemployment rate in the country. We have recovered a vast majority of the jobs lost during COVID and we now have the lowest unemployment rate of any state in Australia. The government is continuing through our recovery plan to support growth and jobs in Western Australia and to keep Western Australia safe and strong. We are supporting Western Australians to get back into TAFE and training across our state. We have undertaken the largest TAFE capital works program in Western Australian history; that is our \$167 million investment in upgrading TAFEs around the state. We have provided support for apprentices and trainees in Western Australia's building construction industry, re-engagement initiatives in defence and across the board. On top of that, when we came to office, we froze TAFE fees. More recently, we have actually cut TAFE fees by up to 72 per cent in a range of courses across the state to get people back into training. It is having remarkable success, with enrolments increasing by around 20 per cent across the state. Of course, when the last government was in office, what happened with TAFE?

Some course fees went up by more than 500 per cent under the last Minister for Training and Workforce Development, who is now the opposition leader.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It does not resonate?

The opposition leader said that it was not true that course fees went up by 500 per cent. Between 2013 and 2016, an advanced diploma of building surveying went up in cost by 787 per cent to \$11 000. An advanced diploma of engineering technology (electrical) went up by 778 per cent to \$10 999. A diploma of nursing went up by 409 per cent to \$9 467. The diploma in early childhood education went up by 302 per cent to \$10 075. In fact, there are so many courses we could not fit them into a dorothy dix question on the number of courses that went up by these amounts. The opposition leader says it is not true. The facts are there for everyone to see that when she was Minister for Training and Workforce Development, course costs in important courses like building surveying, engineering technology and nursing went up by around or more than 500 per cent. When she says that it is untrue they went up by 500 per cent, on one level she is right, because some of them went up by nearly 800 per cent!

That was the damage done by the last Liberal government to the training sector in Western Australia, but the great news today is that Western Australia's jobs are coming back. We have the lowest unemployment rate of any of the states in the country, and that is a credit to all Western Australians.