

ACTIV FOUNDATION — LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRIAL WORKSITE CLOSURES

**317. Mr H.T. JONES to the Minister for Disability Services:**

Welcome back, minister. I refer to Activ Foundation's recent decision to close its large-scale sites for supported employees in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house on what the state government's position is on this decision?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this situation should be resolved in the interests of participants and families who rely on this valuable service, including what role the commonwealth government should play?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. I would first like to acknowledge the anguish of supported employees and their families as a result of Activ's announcement this week to close its large-scale sites in Western Australia. I also acknowledge the member's personal connection to the program and the upheaval that this has caused his family, amongst the hundreds of WA families adversely affected by this decision. It has come as a huge shock to those involved, many of whom have been supported by Activ for decades. I also point out my disappointment that just eight weeks' notice has been allowed for those families to absorb and adapt to this devastating news. Having a job expands social networks, raises living standards, increases financial independence and promotes a sense of self-worth and confidence.

But we need to be clear about what has led to this point, and I must reiterate that the commonwealth has always had responsibility for supported employment. The state will continue to play its role and uphold all its obligations to Western Australians with disability, as we always have, contributing nearly \$1 billion annually to the scheme as detailed in last week's budget. Indeed, what has occurred in the last 18 months is that the commonwealth has transitioned supported employment to the National Disability Insurance Scheme pricing framework for supports and employment from the previous federal disability employment assistance program.

I have been working closely with Activ and the NDIS minister, Minister Reynolds, to try to encourage a positive outcome for Activ to sustainably transition. Although there was a strong undertaking from Minister Reynolds to try to resolve the issues, it has clearly been to no avail. I ask: where is the leadership that Western Australians expect from the National Disability Insurance Scheme minister, who is a Western Australian senator, no less? Minister Reynolds' only advice to Activ was that the NDIS could not hand out grants to the organisation. Activ is not looking for a handout; it is looking for the continuation of a funding model that was previously in place with the commonwealth government and served the disability community well. Activ and other Australian disability enterprises could at least be assisted to transition their business models to the new system; in fact, members—this is the rub—the federal government has been sitting on a \$67 million support package for Australian disability enterprises, such as Activ's supported employment workshops, designed to help with the transition to new wage structures following a final decision by the Fair Work Commission. The federal government has been sitting on that money for months. Not one dollar from this fund has been allocated to any industrial disability enterprise to date. The Activ Foundation has repeatedly called on the federal government to allocate that funding in order to prepare for the transition, again to no avail. The commonwealth continues to sit on an unspent \$67 million transition fund. It is doing nothing with it—nothing. All the while, organisations such as Activ are now thinking about closing supported employment services and seeing hundreds of people with disability—our most vulnerable—across WA without jobs, many of whom have held those jobs for decades.

The McGowan government now calls on the federal government and Activ to immediately suspend that decision to close the supported employment workshops. All concerned parties need to keep the participants and their families in mind—they are central—as they continue to work through every possible option to keep these workshops functioning. I note that the federal opposition leader, Anthony Albanese, has this week confirmed that if elected Prime Minister, he will work to save the Activ workshops from closing, and I urge the Morrison government to make the same commitment and alleviate the anguish being experienced by the supported employees and their families.