

EMPLOYMENT FIGURES

**42. Mr I.M. BRITZA to the Treasurer:**

Over the past few months the opposition has made conflicting statements about employment and the economy. Can the minister please update the house on the genuine Western Australian employment figures and how our state compares with others?

**Dr M.D. NAHAN replied:**

The question is a very good one. This will show us a couple of themes. First, the Leader of the Opposition, who aspires to be the leader of the state as Premier, does not have a clue about the economy and, because of that, he has been getting into the business of talking it down. When the monthly data for December came out last month, it showed a pick-up of unemployment in Western Australia. But anybody who has any remote knowledge about employment data knows that we should not jump on a month. But the Leader of the Opposition did. He came out and said, “Horror, horror! If the unemployment rate goes up, employment growth goes down”. He condemned the Barnett government for its performance on jobs. When Saul Eslake, a very respected economist, was on *6PR Drive*, he said, “Listen, big mistake. One month does not make a trend.” He also said that if the Leader of the Opposition knew what he was talking about, he would have looked at the trends of the past six months or the past year. If he had—it was in the same publication—he would have found that employment growth in Western Australia over the previous 12 months, including the month of December, was 3.3 per cent, which exceeds population growth and the growth in the demand for jobs and the supply of labour. Putting this in context, this was during a period of huge headwinds—lower commodity prices, a slowing demand in the retail sector and the movement from construction to production. It was a phenomenal result, yet the Leader of the Opposition criticised us.

When the job figures came out this month, the Leader of the Opposition was nowhere to be seen because it was completely the opposite of what he claimed the month before. In fact, in the month ending January, jobs growth was 0.4 per cent which, times it by 12, is an average 4.8 per cent. I am not claiming that that is the trend going forward. But I look over the past year and given the headwinds that we have felt, that is a phenomenal result. We have the lowest unemployment rate, the highest participation rate and the highest employment growth in the nation. It is the highest in the nation! Why? Craig James, an economist with CommSec, put out a report on the state of the states and said that the reason—it is not surprising—that Western Australia’s growth is holding up is that as the mining sector slows and the exchange rate goes down and wages go down, other sectors pick up the gap, which always happens. It has been a phenomenal pick-up, but there are reasons for that. Yesterday, we heard about the double-digit growth in international tourism. Why is that happening? It is happening because of the policy we put in place to facilitate it and because of this government’s initiative—some of which was funded by debt, which opposition members criticised. There are 1 200 hotel rooms committed to or under construction in this state, which is phenomenal. We could not have tourism during the growth period because there were no beds. Now we have it. We have a capital works program of a phenomenal nature. Indeed, the top six programs will create 12 000 jobs, but if we put together all the major projects under construction in Western Australia that are funded by government, that equates to the creation of 82 000 jobs. Those 82 000 jobs are across health, education, transport, sport and recreation—you name it! It is phenomenal.

The Leader of the Opposition said that we have not done enough to diversify international tourism—wrong! He also said that we have not done enough in health. What kind of zoo does he live in? That is ridiculous! He says he drives to Parliament House every day from Rockingham—what about Fiona Stanley Hospital? Is he blind? Does he wear blinkers? That is ridiculous. In fact, I think we even redeveloped Rockingham hospital. He does not even know about his own electorate! He also criticised us for not putting money into technology. He should go to Curtin University because royalties for regions has allowed us to put a huge amount of money into agriculture. The story is that despite the headlines—it is tough out there to grow—we are doing a phenomenal job in job growth. The Leader of the Opposition should be out there saying, “Good on ya!”, because what we are doing is leading to Western Australia being the place to be and is building on our strength. All the Leader of the Opposition does is bag us.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Treasurer, you have 30 seconds to wind this up.

**Dr M.D. NAHAN:** The real story is that the Leader of the Opposition does not have any feel for or knowledge of the key issues facing the state, which are economic matters. He has no feel for them; in fact, he is all spin. He has been caught out talking down the economy when he should be talking it up.