

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

**324. Ms A.E. KENT to the Minister for Training:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's \$93.4 million investment in the budget to increase workforce participation in Western Australia. Can the minister advise the house how this investment will support more Western Australians to secure a job and create a pipeline of workers in critical, high-priority industries, including the healthcare and construction sectors?

**Ms S.F. McGURK replied:**

I am very pleased to be able to address this issue. Like the Premier, I listened to the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech and heard him refer to the budget as being full of smoke and mirrors. In the area of training alone, \$93.4 million would buy a lot of smoke and a lot of mirrors. That was an extraordinarily naive and ignorant thing to say. These are real initiatives that are making a difference to people's lives. We will spend \$93.4 million across a range of initiatives that have been largely created as a result of talking to industry about what it wants and what challenges it has with getting skilled labour in particular.

I will look first at the construction industry. The government is very focused on that industry across a range of different portfolios. In my area of training, \$27 million from the construction training fund will go towards encouraging more local construction businesses to take on local apprentices and trainees. That is a significant increase, up from \$10 000 to \$12 000, for local businesses to take on apprentices in the construction industry. At the end of April, I was pleased to announce with the Minister for Housing a \$47.6 million boost to the workforce. Part of that announcement was \$11 million for the introduction of a targeted visa subsidy program to support Western Australian construction businesses to attract and employ overseas skilled workers over the next two years. About 1 100 skilled workers will come across for that program. We announced that program with the Housing Industry Association. The other M. McGowan—Michael McGowan—was there for that announcement. The HIA's press release on this announcement states —

“The Government's investment of \$11 million to support skilled migration and its continued support of apprentices in this budget is an important step in the right direction to improve labour supply.

The HIA was fulsome in its support. In a letter to the Premier, Mr Michael McGowan from the Housing Industry Association said —

On behalf of Housing Industry Association and our members, I would like to congratulate you on delivering another successful budget ...

...

Of particular note is your support of HIA's proposal to subsidise the migration of 1,100 skilled workers into the residential and commercial building industry. HIA is proud to have worked on this initiative with your government and we look forward to its successful implementation over the next 12 months.

That is what we do, members: we listen, engage and work with industries on the solutions they need to target particular areas of concern. We are working very hard on that area, particularly around the construction industry. Our announcement includes a whole lot of initiatives, particularly in the construction industry, to enable group training organisations to access support for apprentices and trainees. This program was initially dedicated to state government construction projects, but we have extended it. Some of those employers will be able to get a subsidy of up to \$134 000 for a four-year apprentice or trainee in their industry. It is a significant subsidy.

The sort of investment that we are putting in place across the board is paying dividends. The number of building and construction apprentices, including electrical apprentices, has reached record levels, finishing 12 per cent higher compared with last year. It is a significant increase. More than 45 000 apprentices and trainees are in training this year, which is 1 600 more than last year. A figure that came across my desk and that struck me was a comparison of commencements with pre-pandemic numbers. The number of commencements in February this year was 70 per cent higher than in February 2020. We are starting to see the results. We are working on targeted programs, such as in the health sector through the support for diploma of nursing students that we announced up in Port Hedland. We were also up there to offer support, through targeted programs, for apprentices and trainees who need to have time off the job in regional WA. We are working on women in non-traditional trades, we are targeting older workers and we are doing a whole lot of dedicated work to make sure that Western Australians have access to free courses and a record number of discounted courses so that they are able to skill up to meet the needs of WA employers.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Central Wheatbelt with the last question.