

CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE — REVIEW

20. Dr J. KRISHNAN to the Premier:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's successful management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Western Australia.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on how the independent review into Western Australia's COVID-19 response will prepare WA for future pandemics?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house how WA's soft landing has paved the way for tourism events to flourish?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Riverton for the question.

- (1)–(2) Obviously, it has been a long three years dealing with COVID, but the state has done incredibly well and had some of the best public health and economic outcomes in the world, probably the best outcomes of anywhere in the world, including world-leading vaccination rates. But now that the state of emergency is well over and now that we have the opportunity to reflect, a few weeks ago, we appointed an independent review committee to look at our response to COVID so that we can get the learnings from this experience over the last few years, compile them and provide a blueprint, if you like, of what to do and what not to do, potentially, in the future when another pandemic comes along, as inevitably it will. Those three people include Hon John Day, former Minister for Health in the last government and a dentist—we have to remember a dentist is a well-respected medical professional—Emeritus Professor Margaret Seares, AO, and Dr Michael Schaper, who is an economic expert. They will look at all aspects and report back and we will learn the lessons for the future. I understand that we are the only government in Australia at this point in time that has undertaken these steps.

It is now around 12 months since we lifted the border arrangements and as has been commented on, and I read about it today, we have had an incredible last week of events and activity in Western Australia. We had Sting, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Fringe World, the Perth Festival and the Ultimate Fighting Championship, which is mixed martial arts. Of course, that was possible only because we allowed for the Octagon so that those activities could be conducted without participants falling out of the ring, which reversed the silly position of the last government. That involved 9 000 people visiting from the eastern states, who were ticketed. I am also advised thousands of people came just to be part of the excitement. They came from the east, stayed in hotels and I assume spent large amounts of money in hotels. They came over to be part of it. Many thousands of tickets sold for that event at RAC Arena. I am also advised it was the largest crowd ever at the arena. Then of course not to forget the Australian Sprintcar Championship in Kwinana—an important event for the large part of the community and an Australia-wide event that attracts people from interstate to Western Australia.

Our tourism figures show that Perth and Western Australia are thriving as destinations. We have had some of the highest domestic spend in tourism in Western Australia on record. There has been a major lift in spend compared with pre-COVID. The domestic spend and also the interstate and international spend—particularly the interstate spend—have leapt recently and are significantly higher than the period pre-COVID, which is an important point because we had naysayers. We had people who said our management of the pandemic would destroy the state's reputation forever and tourists would not come back to Western Australia because of what the Western Australian government did. For instance, on 29 January 2022, the now Leader of the Liberal Party said —

... WA's continued isolation was causing "broader reputational damage".

So, saving thousands of lives was causing broader reputational damage, according to the Leader of the Liberal Party. But the evidence is now in, as I just outlined to members, that that was wildly inaccurate and incorrect. A media statement by a gentleman by the name of Hon Neil Thomson declared that the border closures we put in place meant tourism operators "face a bleak future". As I said, the figures are better than they were pre-COVID, with amazing events attracting people from around Australia and around the world. Then we have the former member for North West Central. The Nationals WA cannot be held responsible for him. We cannot be held responsible for him either! He said —

Our tourism reputation has been shot, our reputation over east has been shot and our international relations have been tarnished because of the actions of this Premier, or because of his inaction by not reopening the borders ...

How wrong you all were.