

CORONAVIRUS — STATE ECONOMY — RESPONSE

328. Dr J. KRISHNAN to the Premier:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's strong and stable response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in delivering the strongest economy in the country.

- (1) Can the Premier advise the house what today's job figures show about WA's efforts to deliver a soft landing from the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (2) Can the Premier outline to the house how an Albanese federal Labor government would support the state government in further driving the WA economy, creating local jobs and meeting the challenges facing Western Australia?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Riverton for the question.

- (1)–(2) Today we have sensational economic news for Western Australia. Western Australia is leading the nation. Our unemployment rate now has a “2” in front of it. Our unemployment rate has fallen to 2.9 per cent, by far the lowest unemployment rate in Australia; and a full percentage point lower than the national unemployment rate of 3.9 per cent with very, very high participation rates—way above those of any other state or territory in the commonwealth. The last time the unemployment rate was this low was when Labor was last in government. No other state in history has had an unemployment rate under three per cent other than Western Australia.

When we came to government, we committed to putting Western Australia back into its rightful position of leading the nation—and we have. When we arrived in office in 2017, after the eight and a half years of Liberal–National government, the unemployment rate was 6.5 per cent; it is now 2.9 per cent. In other words, we have more than halved the unemployment rate. Significantly, Western Australia's youth unemployment rate is the lowest of all the states. The figures show employment has increased by 5.8 per cent over the year to April and, very significantly, full-time employment, full-time jobs, rose by 19 000 jobs in April. For the first time ever, there are now one million Western Australians in full-time work. As I said, we continue to have the highest participation rate in the country. It is clear that our efforts to diversify the economy and ensure we got through the COVID pandemic with our industries open with good health and economic outcomes have worked, and we have achieved the soft landing we were looking for. We have made some very difficult decisions—put in place safe border controls; ensured that our population was one of, if not the most, vaccinated in the world; kept industry open when it closed all over the world and in other states of Australia; and avoided the extensive lockdowns that occurred in other states of Australia that resulted in a booming internal economy in Western Australia and a booming export economy in Western Australia. This is a credit to the hard work and understanding of all Western Australians out there.

Of course, none of that would have been possible if the Liberals and Nationals and their friend Clive Palmer had succeeded in introducing the virus into Western Australia. If they had succeeded in their quest to do so, our economic figures would be very different, our unemployment rate would be much higher and our health outcomes would have been far, far worse. It was terrific to have a federal opposition leader, in Anthony Albanese, support us in what we had to do over that period. I am sure that if Anthony Albanese is elected as Prime Minister of Australia on Saturday, we will work cooperatively on a range of initiatives to boost local employment even further, whether it is in local manufacturing, particularly of buses; local health investment; the Aboriginal cultural heritage centre; or important initiatives, such as making child care more affordable and responding to climate change.

This government has produced the best employment figures and the lowest unemployment rates in Australia at the same time as driving down debt. The commonwealth has increased debt fivefold to a trillion dollars—\$1 000 billion—whereas this government has paid off a third of the debt that was in the forward estimates of the last Liberal–National government and it continues to drive down debt this financial year. We can do these things at once if we have a stable, sensible and responsible government that is focused on employment and good health outcomes, which is exactly what this government has been.