

FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK

Statement

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [5.47 pm]: In the dying minutes of a three-week sitting, I would like to spend some time again talking about the time, but this time I will not be talking about daylight saving time. I promise I will stop saying the word “time” very soon!

Hon Dr Brian Walker: Sometime!

Hon WILSON TUCKER: Sometime soon!

I would like to spend some time talking about how much time we spend at work because it is an important question. A lot of us derive a lot of value and a sense of identity from the work we do. Certainly, in a lot of Western capitalist societies we spend a lot of time at work as well. I know parliamentary hours are slightly different from the standard nine to five. It probably feels like a bit of a sticky wicket coming at the end of a three-week sitting block, but I do not think we are doing too badly here considering all the party pies in the members’ bar next door, as opposed to the standard nine to five, or the five-and-two roster, that most West Aussies do on a day-to-day basis. There is an opportunity in Western Australia to read the room, look at what other jurisdictions are doing in this space and consider the vibe that is happening globally around our relationship with work. The pandemic has fundamentally changed how we work and where we work. Forty per cent of jobs are now considered remote positions. The other question we should be asking ourselves is: how much time are we spending at work? I am talking about the adoption of a four-day working week here in Western Australia. I recently conducted a poll by Painted Dog Research, which is a reputable research company based here in Perth. I asked a number of questions, one of which was the very simple question: do I support the implementation a four-day working week? It is a very simple question but it had some very striking results, although not as striking as we would expect when talking about reducing working hours. The results were that seven per cent strongly opposed the implementation a four-day working week; four per cent opposed it but not as strongly, although they were still against it; and 21 per cent were sitting on the fence. They probably wanted more information before making up their mind. Then there was 14 per cent who supported —

Hon Martin Pritchard interjected.

Hon WILSON TUCKER: We are talking about a four-day work week, Hon Martin Pritchard.

Support was at 14 per cent. A massive 54 per cent of people strongly supported a four-day working week. That is a net total of 68 per cent in support of a four-day working week in Western Australia and a net 11 per cent who oppose it. Painted Dog’s research has a statistical significance to a degree of 95 per cent of the Western Australian population. It is proportional and representative of the Western Australian population. Some 68 per cent of the population supports a four-day working week. I know that the government typically leads from the middle. It needs a groundswell and a vast broad public consensus to get anything done, really, but I would say that 68 per cent gives the government that mandate. That is massive support. The majority supports a four-day working week.

I will frame this and give members some background into how much time we have been spending at work over the last century. About a century ago, people worked 60 hour weeks, so 10-hour days for six days a week. In the 1950s, there was a bit of a revolution led by Henry Ford and a few others, and industrialised countries changed their approach to work. We then moved from the 60-hour working week to what we now know as the 40-hour working week. We also got a few other employee benefits. The relationship with work fundamentally changed. Henry Ford discovered that if employers threw more hours at their employees, they did not necessarily get more output. There was a drop off and a sweet spot. For a long time, that sweet spot has been the 40-hour working week. Since the 50s, we have not seen much change in this area, but the pandemic came along and has really changed where we work. There is now a global movement and a groundswell around how much time we spend at work. The four-day working week proposes essentially a 32-hour working model that is sometimes referred to as 180–100, which means employees get 100 per cent of the pay for 80 per cent of the time, and the expectation is that productivity is maintained at 100 per cent. I am sure that some members are sitting there and rolling their eyes thinking that is not achievable. How will we squeeze out 20 per cent more productivity in just 80 per cent of the time? That is not achievable for some industries. If we look at manufacturing industries or sectors that rely on manufacturing, we have about a century of studies on productivity and labour-saving investments in those areas. A 20 per cent gain in those areas is probably unrealistic or certainly harder to achieve, at least at the superficial level. Areas that are public facing and involve communicating with the general public have some challenges when talking about the adoption of a four-day working week. But a four-day working week is achievable for the majority of the population of people who live in Australia and western industrialised capitalist countries.

There are jurisdictions doing some work here. The political parties in Spain and Scotland went to the elections on the back of trialling a four-day working week. They were successful. There have been similar movements in the United Kingdom and there are six trials happening globally. The 4 Day Week Global Foundation is a consortium that is looking into this. A number of reports are coming out backed by Boston University, the University of Cambridge

and others. Australia has just signed up as a participant in that trial, with a report to land in April. A recent Senate inquiry with members from Labor, the coalition and the Greens supported and recommended that the government of the day implement a four-day working week trial for agencies in the commonwealth public sector.

There is a movement here. There is a groundswell. I will certainly have more to say on this topic. As we enter what could be considered our autumn break, I ask members to consider the benefits of the adoption of a four-day working week here in Western Australia.