

STATE BUDGET — COST-OF-LIVING INCREASES

142. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Premier:

I refer to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia's consumer confidence survey released today that shows for the first time since September 2020 more Western Australians expect economic conditions to weaken than to strengthen due largely to the soaring cost of living. Is the Premier comfortable sitting on a \$5.8 billion surplus while WA families struggle to make ends meet?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

Thank you to the member for the question.

There are a few things to report in relation to this. First of all, the employment figures came out today that showed that 6 882 full-time jobs were created in Western Australia in the month of February. That means that since this government has been in office, around 152 000 jobs have been created in Western Australia. It is incredibly strong employment growth in Western Australia. The second point is that we now have the highest participation rate in history at 70 per cent. We have the highest rate of all the states and the highest rate in history, which means the confidence of people in the labour market is extraordinarily strong. Those figures came out today—in the midst of the Omicron outbreak in Western Australia that has occurred. We have our record in terms of economic activity and reforms, and our encouragement of activity and our management of COVID has resulted in those extraordinarily strong employment figures.

In terms of the cost of living, obviously we are very sympathetic to Western Australians in terms of these issues. That is why we gave everyone the \$600 grant on their electricity bill a bit over a year ago. That is why we have, at various points in time, frozen electricity and water increases. That is why we recently put in place the two-zone fare cap, which is saving some families up to \$3 000 a year in their use of public transport. That is why we made free rapid antigen tests available. We in Western Australia are the only government in Australia to have done that for families. As members know, when you go to buy them, they can be quite expensive. We have made free RATs available to households and we are extending that as we speak across Western Australia.

Contrast that with the last government when there was around a 10 per cent increase in electricity each and every year on average. That is what happened in terms of cost-of-living pressures under the last Liberal–National government. At the same time of record revenues, record debt and record deficits. Members opposite had quite an extraordinary record the last time they were in office. We understand that issues are out there, and a lot of them are obviously outside our control. The war in the Ukraine—as unbelievable as it is that I am actually saying that; a war in Europe—is causing many unintended and adverse consequences across the world, particularly in relation to cost-of-living pressures, but we have a budget that is coming up later this year. In the lead-up to and during that budget process, all those matters will be considered.