

TRAINING AND SKILLS — INVESTMENT

193. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Premier:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to delivering a strong economy and creating more employment opportunities for Western Australians.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on the work underway to ensure that Western Australians have the skills and training needed to support and grow our economy?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house of this government's record of driving down unemployment and creating more jobs for West Aussies?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. It is a very important one, because Western Australian jobs are our highest priority as a government. We want to keep our economy moving. We want Western Australia to be the strongest state in Australia. This morning, I was with the Minister for Training and Workforce Development, Simone McGurk, and we visited the Construction Futures Centre in the member for Belmont's electorate. There we met some of the apprentices who will help build many of the homes we need in Western Australia. Those apprentices—Ava, Marcus and Noah—are all working on residential projects in Perth. In fact, Marcus and Ava were on site this morning and came off to spend some time with us. Each of them is benefiting from the WA Labor government's group training wage subsidy initiative. This is a really important initiative that subsidises group training organisations to bring more apprentices on, so that they can continue to feed the workforce that we need for our residential construction industry. We introduced this program early last year to help small to medium-sized businesses employ aspiring trades. This has helped to get 300 apprentices and trainees into a job in the construction sector, where they are desperately needed. We are talking about in-demand skills here; we are talking about plumbing, carpentry, electrical and gas-fitting skills. Today, we announced an additional 150 building and construction apprentice places. They will be made available immediately. This involves a \$21.5 million expansion to the current program. All up, it will be an \$87.8 million program. Our GTO wage subsidy provides around \$135 000 for a full year apprenticeship, which is the average estimated award wage of apprentices in building and construction. We are doing everything we can to build more houses across WA and we are doing all we can to create quality jobs for Western Australians. We understand that one of the key constraints around the housing construction industry at the moment is the availability of workers. This is an important opportunity to directly inject workers into that industry so that we can get more homes built here in WA.

Our commitment to jobs is second to none. We have had a record investment in infrastructure. We have invested in training and TAFE, providing free TAFE courses for more than 40 000 Western Australians. We have brought local manufacturing back to Western Australia. We are diversifying the economy and investing in the future. The latest job figures again demonstrate our success. I do not know whether members have seen them, but they are off the chart! Data released today shows that Western Australia's unemployment rate fell to 3.6 per cent, below the national average of 3.7 per cent. I remind all members that when we came to government, unemployment was 6.5 per cent, among the highest in the nation. Employment in WA grew by a massive 1.7 per cent last month. That is more than 26 000 jobs in a single month, and it is the best result of all the states. It is our strongest growth in employment in almost three years. I might add that 73 000 jobs have been added to the WA economy since June last year. That is an extraordinary vote of confidence by businesses in Western Australia, people voting with their feet, coming to WA to take up the huge opportunities of a job in Western Australia.

In another record, for the first time WA's total employment exceeded 1.6 million. Our policies are working. We are making the investments that are needed to keep growing Western Australian jobs, providing young people with the skills they need for the jobs of not only today, but also the future. I congratulate the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. She and her team are doing a great job supporting young people getting great Western Australian jobs, which is our government's number one priority.