

CORONAVIRUS — SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE GRANT

Motion

MRS A.K. HAYDEN (Darling Range) [4.01 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to stop neglecting our hardworking Western Australian small and family-run businesses by immediately providing a COVID-19 assistance grant to COVID-19 affected small businesses of up to \$10 000, like all other governments have done across Australia, because behind every small business is a family.

It is sad that we need to come into this place today and ask this government to take the Western Australian small business sector seriously and back it like every other state government across Australia has done. I want to say from the outset that the other states did this at the beginning of the pandemic. It is now August and we are still asking this government to show and lend support to our small businesses, which are the backbone of our state. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, I have been hearing from many diverse sectors of our small business community. They have been struggling with the reality of being forced to shut their doors, standing down staff, and not knowing whether they have a future and, if they do, what their future will look like. I must admit that many small businesses—I do mean many—have said that if they return, it will be a far leaner operation. That means fewer staff, fewer jobs, fewer people earning money and less money going to our families and into our households. As we all know, everyone in Western Australia is already suffering under the cost-of-living increases of \$850 a year inflicted upon them by this Labor McGowan government. To now hear that businesses will reopen their doors but come back leaner is a very scary and sad proposition, and unemployment levels will rise across our state.

As I said, some small businesses are reopening, which is fantastic. They have been able to pivot their business in an effort to reinvent themselves and to remain open and operational. Are they making money? That is yet to be seen, but they are just delighted to have their doors open and to welcome back some of their staff. I would like to take this opportunity today to pay credit to those businesses that have actually achieved that and been able to reinvest and to reinvent themselves. Small business people are extremely dynamic individuals who are always eager to find a way out of a difficult solution. They are willing to adjust accordingly and they are always prepared to put everything on the line. However, it is worth noting that not all industries have that flexibility. Today I wish to highlight one of those industries in particular.

We are all well aware of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our cafes, restaurants, pubs, hotels and tourism operators. They have all received attention and been highlighted. However, the industry that has not had much support is our travel industry and our travel agents. The travel industry has had very little light shone on it. I believe that it, along with many other small businesses, has been forgotten in the development of the recovery plan and the stimulus packages. Another point that I want to quickly highlight is my concern with the high proportion of females in the travel industry who either are employed by or run a travel agency. As a side note, my biggest fear is that one of the fallouts of the COVID-19 pandemic is a massive drop in the number of women in the workplace. The first businesses that were shut down were in hospitality—cafes, restaurants and retailers. Those businesses predominantly employ women. I think it is worth highlighting as a long-term picture the concern that women will be left out of the workplace post-COVID-19. It is a matter that we need to address, but perhaps not today. I will go back to the topic of travel agents.

Despite travel agencies not being considered tourism-based businesses, they are still an important aspect of the industry. They have completely missed out on any state support. According to the Australian Federation of Travel Agents, there are about 300 storefront travel agencies and about 150 home agencies across Western Australia. About 3 000 people are employed in the retail travel industry across WA. As I said, 72 per cent of all retail travel agency staff are female and 70 per cent of travel agencies are mum-and-dad small business operators. What most people do not comprehend is that, currently, about \$100 million in outstanding travel credits are to be processed over the next two years, and an estimated \$200 million in travel refunds is owed in Western Australia alone. Thousands of holiday bookings have been cancelled—wedding trips, family reunions, special birthday celebrations and the bucket-list holiday. We all have that bucket list that we want to work through before we kick the bucket—some of us will be able to achieve that and some of us will not. Sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the cancellation of many of these trips. These people have been scrimping and saving for years to go on these trips. Every one of these trips required deposits and booking fees to be paid in advance, so when COVID hit, not only did these holidays become broken dreams, but also it became a priority for these families that had been saving for these trips to have their deposits refunded.

With travel bans in place, travel agents were no longer able to earn a living, yet they had to keep their doors open to process these refunds. Every booking requires ongoing work, whether it is to cancel a trip, arrange a refund or postpone a trip to a later date, hoping for the best that the borders will reopen and the bucket-list trip can be realised. To make matters worse, these travel agents have to speak with the many providers from hotels, tour guide operations

and airlines all over the world. The policies and circumstances of each district and industry have been constantly changing. We all know about the changes made here in Western Australia and their massive impact on a daily basis—what we can do, what we cannot do, whether businesses can open, whether businesses can bring back their staff, and the two-square-metre and four-square-metre rules. Those changes have been difficult for us. Imagine that at a higher level with the chaos occurring right now in other countries around the world that have a higher threat. These travel agencies have to deal with businesses in those countries on a daily basis. Of course, the industries in each country are changing their mind on a daily basis, and travel agents have to keep up with that all the time so that they can look after their clients. Let us remember that their clients are Western Australians as well. Clients are desperate to receive a refund. Obviously, in this time of COVID, everyone is looking to save what money they can. Clients are stressed out, extremely emotional and, I have to admit, not always on their best behaviour. Our travel agents are having to endure this. They are working long hours without being able to collect one cent for the hours and days they are working. Their staff still need to be paid, the rent still needs to be paid, the lights must stay on, and their phone bills are obviously going through the roof, having to keep up to date with the changes around the world. Some of the agents I have spoken to have taken on part-time work to be able to pay the bills at home. Obviously, they need to work during the day in their travel agencies, but they are having to work at night too. Some of them are stocking shelves in Woolworths. One has taken up a part-time job as a personal trainer in a gym in the evening. They are not only enduring long hours looking after their clients, but also having to pack up their business, go out and work again so that they can put food on the table for their family and pay their household bills.

Western Australia is processing around \$200 million of travel refunds. I have been led to believe that it is expected to take 10 months to process that \$200 million. That is 10 months of working without any revenue. Those agencies and travel agents are real heroes. They are on the front line. It may not be the medical front line, but it is the economic front line. Every single day they deal with Western Australians who want their money back. They do it for the love of and passion for their industry, but also the care for their clients and, as I said, without collecting a cent.

The Australian Federation of Travel Agents is very concerned about the mental health of the agents within its organisation. The agents are under extreme duress and they are trying to save their businesses while dealing with millions of dollars of cancellations and hundreds of clients calling in. Over the past months, I have asked the minister and the Premier how similar small businesses are meant to keep their head above water. Today I ask the minister: how are the travel agents meant to keep their head above water while still providing that vital service? The last thing we want is to see them shut down, because thousands of Western Australians will be without any recourse to get their money back.

I have told the minister previously—I know he has heard this before—that I have had calls, emails and Zoom meetings and, more recently, thanks to our restrictions being relaxed, face-to-face meetings with small businesses and tourism operators. I have talked to businesses from Broome, Geraldton, Dongara, Kalgoorlie, Esperance, Albany and across the metropolitan area, including, of course, Darling Range. I raise these concerns on their behalf. They have asked me to keep raising this issue, keep putting this matter in front of the minister, and keep highlighting that they need the minister and this government to stand up for them and give them support. Our small business community is on its knees. We have only to open the newspaper or listen to the TV or radio stations to find, sadly, another story of a business that is struggling. They want to pivot; they want to adjust but, as I said earlier, not all can do that. Thousands of businesses are not able to pivot; they are not able to adjust and operate simply because of the current restrictions. Through no fault of their own, they have no alternative. Tourism is well recognised as being hard hit. Hospitality was hit extremely hard, but has now reopened on a small scale. However, in the events industry, the contractors, the skilled labour marketing, the promoters and so forth have a far slower pathway back than our hospitality sector, especially after yesterday's announcement that the Royal Show has been cancelled. I know the minister is well aware that the events industry and the carnival operators were excited to be able to get up and running again, but obviously, due to health advice, the decision has been made to shut that down. Their pathway back is far slower than they expected.

The pathway back for travel agents is even slower and more severe, with months and months, if not years, before they will be able to get up and operate again. The other week I sat down with four local home-based travel agents in Roleystone who told me how they have to pay back commissions that they earned six months ago. They have done their job; they have booked the holiday and they have got their commission. They have used that commission. They have put it back into their business and it has been spent, but they now have to repay the commission they were paid because the holidays were cancelled. It is through no fault of their own, but they are doing the right thing and taking the money out of their pocket and giving it back to their clients. The women I spoke to field calls every day, as I highlighted earlier, and it has taken a toll on them. It has taken a toll on them mentally and they are just trying to keep going. They get the odd phone call or message from a client thanking them, but at the moment everything they do, every holiday they cancel, is causing heartbreak for them.

I heard the same story when I was in Geraldton with our great candidate Rob Dines. He introduced me to Peter and Jenny from Helloworld Travel. Peter told me that \$10 000 would mean that they would be able to keep their doors open and continue through this tough time and help their clients and keep their staff on. Their three staff members are essential. They need the staff because they have the knowledge of the holidays, they have knowledge of the bookings, they know the clients and they have the skill set that is required to manage this serious and difficult situation they are all in.

I was pleased to see that a few of our travel agents have finally received some media attention. I want to draw members' attention to an article in WAtoday of 30 July by Aja Styles headed "'Extremely distressing': WA travel agents can't survive on stimulus so far provided". Even when the government attempts to put out a stimulus for small business operators, they are falling through the gaps. Small business operators have not been able to meet the criteria and be eligible for the packages that the minister and his government have put out. One of the packages was for cheap Virgin flights to the Kimberley for local travel agents. Travel agents thought that could have been a great opportunity to package a deal, get hold of those cheap Virgin flights and get them sent off, and be able to earn some money and help their customers have a great holiday experience. But, sadly, this was not available to the travel agents. Travel agents did not get an opportunity to work with the government and the airlines to build those packages before the announcement was made so that they could actually do some business. Everybody in Western Australia right now is supporting local. Everybody in Western Australia is happy to pay a little extra if it means that they are going to keep that business open on the street and they are going to keep local jobs going in their area. I honestly believe that if the government had worked with the travel agents on the cheap Virgin flights to the Kimberley, that would have been a great opportunity to make that stimulus go even further. When we offer a stimulus package, we need to, first, make sure that we have not created gaps; and, second, maximise that ability to stimulate as far and wide as possible. This is one that I believe was extremely mishandled and an opportunity missed by the state government. The WAtoday article states —

The 7800 tickets travelling between Perth, Broome and Kununurra got snapped up within 48 hours, leaving little opportunity for agents to utilise the deal, according to Christine Ross from Attadale Travel.

This is the travel industry begging and pleading to work with the government, but it was not given that opportunity. It was fantastic that 7 800 tickets were snapped up, but were they return tickets or just one-way tickets? Were they people travelling? Were they having to travel on their own or were they travelling with a partner? How do we know that these tickets actually went to the travel industry, to visitors and to people who were going to go out there and spend? We do not know that. Not using that opportunity to engage with our travel agents is a missed opportunity.

Mrs Ross said that flights in themselves provided very little margins to travel agents, who relied mostly on being able to sell packages that include hotel stays and tours as part of the deal. The article continues —

"We definitely need those types of discounted flights but there was not enough of them to be honest; they were gone so quickly that you couldn't even package them and promote them and advertise them," she said.

"So it really didn't stimulate too much for us."

How long do I keep paying for my business to be here to support the needs of Australian travellers ... at a really heavy expense for my family's financial health, and my mental health?

Christine Ross, Attadale Travel

She is among 300 WA travel agencies lobbying the state government for a travel industry-specific survival grant of between \$5000–\$25,000 through to June 2021, to match similar small business support grants in other states and territories.

This is what the Australian Federation of Travel Agents is doing. I believe the minister has had a meeting with some of its representatives, so I will be interested to hear his thoughts on that and whether there will be any support for them. The article also states —

The Australian Federation of Travel Agents said the industry contributed about \$2 billion annually to the state economy. More than 70 per cent of WA travel agencies were owner-operated small businesses and employed 3500 people, most of who were women.

AFTA chairman Tom Manwaring said ...

"However, without tailored government support while we get back on our feet, the future is bleak."

Flight Centre spokesman Haydn Long said they too had received no government assistance beyond JobKeeper.

"We raised money in April and increased our borrowings at the same time to get a runway in the order of 18 months with zero revenue," ...

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 19 August 2020]

p5256b-5284a

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

Again, they are getting assistance from the Liberal federal government with JobKeeper. I have heard the same story over and over—that if it were not for JobKeeper, these businesses would have been shut and gone long ago. The Liberal federal government stepped up and supported them. They are now asking the state government to do the same. The minister's response in the article was that —

“The travel agent sector faces unique challenges driven principally by international border closures, a responsibility of the federal government,” ...

I also wrote to the minister to ask him a question along the same lines about support for our small businesses and travel agents, and he also gave that response to me—that it is a federal responsibility and that he wiped his hands of it. I do not understand how the Minister for Small Business could just wipe his hands clean of these small business operators in Western Australia. Yes, travel agents may be shut down because of international border closures, but they are also shut down because of state border closures. They are shut down because of COVID-19—through no fault of their own—but they are still servicing Western Australians, for whom the minister is responsible, to make sure that they get their refunds. To palm it off and say that it is only a federal government responsibility is quite disappointing, to say the least. The minister needs to start standing up for the very sectors for which he is the minister—small business and tourism. The minister said further on in the article —

“I undertook to phone [federal Tourism Minister] Simon Birmingham and ask him to consider creating a working group, including industry representatives from the travel agent sector, to look at the challenges they confront and propose a way forward.”

I am super keen to find out when the minister responds today whether he has done what he said he would do and has spoken to the minister, Hon Simon Birmingham, or written to him to ask for what he said he would ask. If he has received a response, I would like to know what it was. I would also like to know what the minister plans to do if he does not receive a response, so that we can move forward on this.

As I said, an article came from my visit to Geraldton that again highlighted the need for our travel agents to get support. A \$10 000 grant would allow them to see it through to the end of this year and even further, to be able to keep their staff on, their lights on, their doors open and servicing their customers. I am begging the minister, on behalf of the travel agents to whom I have spoken, to listen to this and take up their plight and the argument that they are putting forward. I also met with travel agents in Roleystone. Another article on ABC online news on 19 August again highlighted the need for assistance to our small businesses. The article also quotes Ms Ross from Attadale Travel, under the subheading “All work, no pay for travel agents right now”, and states —

She has only been able to retain her four staff members with the help of JobKeeper payments, but fears what will happen when that payment ends.

“Effectively the entire business has been decimated,” she said.

At the same time, she and her staff are working harder than ever because of the amount of time it takes to chase refunds.

“The time that it takes to make a booking usually will equate to about the same amount of time it takes to undo a booking in usual times,” ...

“In Covid times you could say four, five, six times longer to undo a booking because the wholesalers, the airlines, the cruise companies are not operating with full staff because they just can't, because they are bleeding.

“So we spend four, five hours on hold on phone calls.

“If it took me 25-30 hours to make a complicated booking, it's probably taken me somewhere in the vicinity of 80 to 100 hours to undo that booking.”

In the initial weeks of the pandemic, Ms Ross worked seven days a week.

“It was absolutely relentless and extremely distressing,” ...

“We had clients who were on cruise ships off South America that weren't being allowed to go into any of the ports, trying to get them home, a lot of elderly clients.

“We had families that were displaced from each other trying to get them home, flights being cancelled over and over, countries being unable to be transited through, so it was a really distressing time for the clients.”

Each cancellation ‘heartbreaking’ as holiday dreams dashed

City Beach travel agent Jo Francis tells a similar story.

“Every holiday I've had to cancel has been heartbreaking,” she said.

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“And I know for a lot of people it’s not something that they’ll be able to do again.

“A lot of them are elderly, or it was for a special event, weddings all sorts of things have had to be cancelled or postponed.”

She said with refund policies constantly changing as international borders close and reopen, it had been been a frustrating time for agents and customers alike.

“I did have a couple of clients who were pretty distressed and did get pretty angry with me, and I tried my best to talk them through that,” she said.

“These days as I’m dealing with clients, people are much more understanding, but it’s been really tough.

“I think my role is a public servant right now. I feel like I’m providing a free-of-charge service because I don’t get paid for what I do anymore.”

As I said, travel agents are on the front line looking after Western Australians. If they were not there, who would do this for them? If they were not there, hundreds of millions of dollars would not be returned to Western Australians. These ladies are doing an extremely tough job. It is emotional. They are simply asking for some support.

I know the minister will get up and start listing off all the grants and stimulus packages that he and the Premier have provided to small business, but I want to go through them in detail. The majority of small businesses have missed out on all the grants that the minister will outline today. I will start with commercial tenancies. To be eligible for the commercial tenancy package, businesses need to have had a 30 per cent drop in revenue. What members need to understand is that the majority of businesses had already had that drop in revenue prior to COVID-19. Retail was doing it tough. Small businesses were doing it tough. Everyone was doing it tough prior to COVID-19 coming along. Then COVID-19 dropped. Even if revenue dropped another five, 10 or 15 per cent, it was enough to hurt them, but it was not enough to make them eligible, because they had already experienced a drop prior to COVID-19. They have also had the stress of dealing with their landlords. I can say that some landlords have been excellent; other landlords could improve their customer relations. They could also perhaps support the small businesses that are paying the rent and have been tenants for a very long time, but we are not here to discuss landlords right now. The businesses I have spoken to have not been assisted by the commercial tenancies package. A couple have had some help, but many have fallen through the gap because they have not been able to prove that 30 per cent drop, which is the eligibility requirement for COVID-19 relief.

Payroll tax relief of a \$17 500 payback grant is available to employers with an annual payroll between \$1 million and \$4 million. I do not know the last time the minister spoke to a small business operator, but not many have a \$1 million payroll. Most small businesses do not have a payroll of \$1 million-plus. I asked the Treasurer a question on notice about how many small businesses had applied for payroll tax relief. I asked him to advise how many small businesses had been able to access the \$17 500 payroll tax relief. The answer was that 5 300 employees claimed the waiver, but—this is the kicker—this includes payroll of up to \$7.5 million. Again, I do not know any small business that has a \$7.5 million payroll. Of the businesses across Western Australia applying for payroll tax relief, 5 300 have a payroll of up to \$7.5 million but the payroll must amount to over \$1 million to pay payroll tax. Currently, there is no data on how many have received that payment. I believe it was automatically paid in mid-July so I have a question for the Treasurer to find out how many of those 5 300 businesses received the grant and how many of the 5 300 were small businesses. I think I can guess the answer, but we live in hope. I have heard feedback on the ground, and I have not met one small business owner who can benefit from the payroll tax relief.

I refer to the tourism survival package, which the minister said would be the bee’s knees in supporting our tourism sector, with \$6 500 to support 1 600 tourism operators. I admit that at the time I said 1 600 was not nearly enough. There are over 28 000 tourism-related businesses, and I know the minister has another figure of, I think, around 5 000 tourism businesses. Even if we work on a figure of 5 000 tourism businesses, the minister was offering 1 600 tourism businesses \$6 500 from a massive fund of \$10.4 million. From an answer I received from the minister to a question on notice, out of the 1 600 grants available, only 884 tourism operators qualified and received that funding. The minister even fell short of his own target of 1 600 businesses. Only 884 businesses qualified to receive the funding out of the \$10.4 million. That means the minister dished out just over \$5.7 million to the 884 businesses and that he has over \$4.6 million left in the kitty. The amount of \$4.6 million is sitting in the minister’s kitty and that could be helping our small business operators right now. However, because he made the criteria so tight, he has not been able to assist even his own target of 1 600 business and has left thousands of tourism businesses without any assistance at all. When the minister dangled a carrot and said that he had the answer to support tourism and small business, all he did was deliver them a lemon.

I am keen to know what is happening with the \$4.6 million he has left stashed away from the \$10.4 million fund. Where is the \$4.6 million? When will the businesses get it and will they get it in time, or is he waiting for them to shut their doors for good? The other issue he is going to spruik is his tourism recovery grants of between \$25 000

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and \$100 000, again with a cap of \$4 million. Maybe he could add that other \$4 million and double it. That would be nice, because at the moment, the grant of between \$25 000 and \$100 000 with a cap of \$4 million will support only 40 businesses if they all receive \$100 000. Let us give the minister the benefit of the doubt and say that all the applicants will get only \$25 000—the lower end. He will still help only 160 businesses. Out of 226 000 small businesses across Western Australia, the minister has a recovery grant that will help between only 40 and 160 businesses. Let us give the minister some credit and say he will help the maximum number of 160 out of 226 000 small businesses. That is appalling. The feedback I have received from the sector is that the application process is way too onerous; it is complicated and requires a lot of detail and a lot of depth. Many of them are saying they cannot fill in the form and have to employ an accountant or a bookkeeper to do so. I need to remind the minister that these businesses are doing it tough. They do not have money in the bank to employ an accountant or a bookkeeper to fill in a form to apply for money because they are in trouble. They are applying for the grant because they are in hardship. The minister is saying, “We’ll give you money, but fill in this form. I know you won’t be able to fill it out; you’ll have to pay someone to do that.” What does that mean? The minister hopes people will not put in the application. Will he keep the \$4 million and put it with the other \$4.6 million he did not dole out?

I am very keen to find out. I know we do not have the figures yet but I will be asking how many people applied for this grant and I am very keen to see how many people were successful. It is another stimulus by his government that has let down thousands of small businesses. His one-off small business tariff offset of \$2 500 to businesses that use under 50 megawatts of power is great—fantastic! However, his own media release said that he will be able to help only 95 000 businesses if they all apply and if they are all eligible. Again, of the more than 220 000 small businesses, his package will help a maximum of 95 000 businesses. I was interested to hear today in question time the answer to one of my questions when the Premier spruiked that this will help hundreds of thousands of small businesses. Hundreds of thousands of small businesses will receive the one-off small business tariff offset. I suggest the minister update the Premier that his package will not deliver what he thinks it will. Not only are small businesses being sold a carrot and delivered a lemon, but also I think he has sold his Premier a lemon because he believes this will help hundreds of thousands of small businesses, when the minister’s media release says 9 720 to be precise, because, again, he is applying a cap of \$236.8 million. I have talked to businesses out there and they have said that if they use under 50 megawatts of power, they will not be able to apply. All they will need is a cooler fridge in the corner containing drinks and, bang, they are gone—they cannot apply. Again his one-off small business tariff is falling short and making a massive hole for our small businesses to fall through.

I refer to a small business grant. Hang on—wait; he does not have one. Every other state around the country has one, but this minister does not. I will touch on that in a moment.

I refer to the PIVOT program, which I suppose is one of the newer programs that has come out. The Small Business Development Commission will deliver a free recovery program to businesses with fewer than 20 staff, including sole traders, that will offer online webinars, mentoring and tools to help WA small businesses develop new ways of operating to successfully pivot operations following the impact of COVID-19. That is great; I am glad to see the SBDC knows what a small business is. The minister may need to read its briefing notes a little more closely. Sole traders are included, which is fantastic, but again it does not address businesses that are unable to pivot; it does not help businesses, such as our travel agents, to change the way they operate due to a situation that is no fault of their own. Our events industry cannot pivot. Until they can conduct events such as the Perth Royal Show, they cannot pivot their business. People cannot put a sideshow alley ride on the side of the river and start selling tickets. It cannot happen. Again, the PIVOT program sounds lovely; it sounds warm and fluffy but it will not deliver.

I note that last week when I asked a question in Parliament some comments were made by the minister and the Premier that no other state is offering a \$10 000 grant. It obviously highlights that the minister is not in touch with his counterparts in the other states. I encourage him to do a little research because some states around Australia are doing extremely well. They are supporting their small businesses; they understand that our small business industries are our backbone. They understand our small businesses are mum-and-dad operators.

Mr P. Papalia: Are you sure I said that?

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: On the floor of the chamber.

Mr P. Papalia: Are you sure you’re not misleading Parliament?

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I am not misleading Parliament. Unlike the minister, I do not mislead Parliament.

Mr P. Papalia: Are you sure you’re not misleading Parliament right now saying that I said that?

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I will ignore the minister because he is being silly.

Mr P. Papalia: I know what I said.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I am encouraging the minister —

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

Mr P. Papalia: You're not misleading Parliament?

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I said the minister and the Premier.

Mr D.C. Nalder: Give her a chance to respond.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Gentlemen!

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I used that term guardedly!

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I am trying to highlight that if the minister was in touch with his counterparts in other states, he would be well aware of what stimulus packages they are providing to their small business sectors. The Northern Territory is absolutely outstanding in what it is doing to promote and support its small businesses. As I was trying to say, small businesses provide us with local jobs. They are run by mums and dads, fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters. They are awesome businesses, which are trying to keep their heads afloat. They employ local people —

Ms A. Sanderson interjected.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Can the member for Morley shush? She just walked in!

Ms A. Sanderson interjected.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: The member is so rude and pathetic!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! Member for Darling Range, if you would like, please talk to me.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Absolutely. You are a lot nicer.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you. I am paid to listen.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: If the minister had engaged with his counterparts, which I strongly suggest he does, he would have learnt of other packages that he could implement in Western Australia, which would be welcomed and would support our small business sector.

On 21 March, Victoria announced a \$500 million business support fund, which provided one-off grants of \$10 000 to support affected businesses in the hardest hit sectors, including hospitality and tourism, accommodation and food services, arts and entertainment, health and beauty services, retail other than supermarkets, groceries, liquor and pharmacy businesses, and other services such as real estate agencies as assessed against the criteria. On 21 March, Victoria was right in there! Right at the start of the COVID pandemic, Victoria stepped up and provided a \$10 000 grant to its small business operators. It understood the need to put security and support behind those businesses. On 17 March—again, right at the very beginning—New South Wales announced a \$1.6 billion tax cut to support businesses. On 3 April, it announced a \$10 000 grant to provide fast relief for New South Wales' small businesses battling COVID-19. Again, New South Wales understood the importance of supporting its small businesses. I note that last week in Parliament comments were made that other states are not giving \$10 000 grants, that they could not be found and that I was making it up.

Mr P. Papalia: I am glad you're correcting yourself now. I told you that I did not say that.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Will the minister please shush? I did not say the minister; I said the minister and the Premier.

A member interjected.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: The minister needs to sit when he talks. He needs to abide by the rules.

Point of Order

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The minister is walking through the chamber and talking to the member on her feet.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is quite right, member for North West Central. Minister, you need to be in your seat to address people. I also point out that you should not be interjecting at the moment. The member for Darling Range has indicated at least twice that she is not accepting interjections at the moment.

Mr P. Papalia: As long as she is not misleading anymore.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, please be a bit careful.

Debate Resumed

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: It is obvious that this minister has no respect for anybody or anything—not even the rules of this place.

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The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do not bait him.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: The Queensland government is another state government that has stepped up in support of its small businesses and understands how important its small business sector is. It understands the employment opportunities it creates and delivers. It gave businesses a \$10 000 grant under its \$100 million package to help them counter the impact of COVID-19. It was a \$100 million package of \$10 000 grants to its small businesses. Members should compare that to our \$10.4 million package, of which the minister spent just over half. The minister has a long way to go!

The South Australian government announced not one round of grants, but two—one on 11 March and the other on 26 March. It understood, the minute that COVID hit, the need to get in and support its small businesses. Unlike this government, it acted quickly and helped its small businesses. It gave two rounds of \$10 000 emergency cash grants to small businesses on 11 March and 26 March. Well done, South Australia! It did a fantastic job.

The Tasmanian government understands its small businesses and the need to support them and that government has to get behind them, back them up, give them confidence and let them know that that their government has their back in times of need. Unlike WA, Tasmania also stepped up. It gave out emergency grants of \$2 500 to businesses under severe hardship. It gave an additional small business hardship grant of \$15 000. A sum of \$20 million was allocated to provide a one-off grant of \$15 000 to those businesses that had been highly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. That was up to \$20 million allocated by Tasmania. If Tasmania can afford to put \$20 million in the pool to support its small businesses, why can WA not? We have had a huge GST return, we get great iron ore royalties and have far more income coming to our state than Tasmania. Tasmania put its money where its mouth is, with \$20 million to support its small businesses. Let me check. It was \$20 million. I just wanted to ensure that I was not misleading Parliament!

I mentioned how great the Northern Territory was. The Northern Territory government needs to be acknowledged for its extremely hard work and its commitment to its small business sector. It created a \$50 million small business survival fund for businesses across the Northern Territory. It had five different packages. To help its small businesses, it not only provided \$50 million of grants, but also helped its businesses with the paperwork. Businesses filled in one application and the government then assessed which grant they were eligible for. Businesses were not eligible for just one grant; they were eligible for all five grants. Getting one grant did not stop businesses getting the third, fourth or fifth grants.

The Northern Territory government gave businesses an immediate survival payment of \$2 000 for businesses with one full-time equivalent employee, \$5 000 for businesses with two to four employees, \$20 000 for businesses with five to 19 employees, and \$50 000 for businesses with more than 20 staff. Let us say that a travel agent has about five to six employees. It would have received \$20 000 from the Northern Territory government. It did not stop there. Businesses could go on to the rapid adaption payment. Businesses with one employee could get up to \$1 000 and \$5 000 for other eligible businesses to offset costs. If a business had five employees, they would now receive another \$5 000. That would be \$25 000 from the Northern Territory government. The third grant was the operational boost payment. Businesses were also able to apply for that on the one application form. A business with five employees would be entitled to another \$16 800. That grant started from \$2 800 for businesses with one employee and went up to \$42 000 for businesses with more than 15 employees. Then there was the operational support statement. Businesses with an annual turnover of greater than \$75 000 were able to get another grant to help pay their full-time staff of \$1 000 for each full-time employee to be paid fortnightly, to a maximum of \$15 000 for each payment. After businesses received all the other payments, the Northern Territory government backed them even more and helped them with their staff. Why did it do that? It helped businesses and kept their people employed. The last grant was the rebound support grant. Businesses would still be able to get that even if they had been successful for the four previous grants. They could get the rebound support grant, which was the government helping businesses to rebound. If people needed to invest in their business to rebound, they could get grants of an unmatched portion worth up to \$5 000. After that, if people wanted to invest in the business even more, the government would match their contribution dollar-for-dollar up to \$10 000. The maximum grant range was between \$10 000 and \$15 000 in total. The Northern Territory is leading the way in supporting its small businesses. It is leading the way in making sure that its local community members have jobs to get up to go to in the morning.

They go to work and come back with money in their pockets to put food on the table. They have money in their pockets to support other small businesses. That is how a government can start getting the economy to turn around.

We need to make sure that our small businesses are getting support. It is obvious that the WA state Labor government has ignored our small business sector. That is obvious just by looking at what other states around Australia have done and what the Minister for Small Business has not done. Comparing all the Western Australian programs I have mentioned, from which small businesses are unable to get funding, with what is happening in other states

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 19 August 2020]

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shows that the minister has failed in his portfolio, he has failed the small business sector of Western Australia and he has failed the tourism sector of Western Australia.

Members will be beginning to understand why I brought this motion on today, and the importance of it. It may be long and laborious for the minister to sit here and listen to these stories, but he needs to listen because he does not understand the dire need out there. He does not understand how desperate our small business operators are. Every single day they are getting up, going to work, incurring bills and not getting money through the door. The minister needs to start standing up for the small business sector.

Several members interjected.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Would the member like to know? Protect West Security—look it up. Operating for 25 years, and still operating successfully.

Ms S.E. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, you are in the chair in a minute, so I do not want to send you home. Can you just be quiet, please. Members, can we let the member for Darling Range finish? I suspect she is on the downward slope now.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I am, but they are encouraging me to keep going!

The fact that government members all think this is a joke and are actually laughing shows their lack of respect for our small business sector. The small business sector is vital to WA's economy and to WA jobs. It is mums and dads who are operating these businesses, and members opposite are laughing at them while they are struggling. Shame on every single one of them. They think it is a joke to come in here and think that these stories are not real. These people are struggling every single day, and members opposite think it is a joke. They go home in their flash cars with their good incomes, which they take to their homes. I suppose when they go out, they are drinking champagne and celebrating their secure income while small businesses are struggling. They are a disgrace.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think Hansard is probably a little bit worried about now, so if members want any of what they are screaming at each other to be recorded, it would be good if Hansard could hear it. One at a time, please. The member for Darling Range still has the call.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: I will ignore the people on the back bench—who will not be there for very long.

Ms S.E. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I call you for the first time, member for Wanneroo.

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: Before I was rudely interrupted by people who do not understand the need for our small business sector, I was explaining the reason I brought this motion to the attention of the house today. We have businesses that are going to the wall, and businesses that, if they do reopen, will reopen as leaner operations, and that means fewer jobs. Unless we get behind these businesses and start supporting them, our unemployment rate is going to go through the roof. Our unemployment rate is already the second highest in the country. I do not know what reputation this government wants to have, but unless it starts taking this issue seriously, it is going to have a reputation for having overseen the largest number of small business bankruptcies, the largest number of businesses closing their doors, and the highest unemployment rate that the state has seen for a very long time.

I have been urged by many small business operators and travel agents to raise a petition to try to highlight this issue. I have a petition online to ask the Premier and the Treasurer to put forward their plan for a \$10 000 grant to help our struggling family run small businesses that are suffering from the effects of COVID-19. Western Australia is the only state in Australia that is not supporting small business, and that is beyond shameful; it is absolutely alarming, and demonstrates the Labor government's lack of understanding.

I do not know what the figures are the moment, but before the outbreak of COVID-19, Western Australia had 226 000 small businesses, which represented 96 per cent of all businesses in our state. We have more than 28 000 tourism-related businesses in Western Australia. Since 22 March many of them have been forced to close and stand down staff, through no fault of their own. It is a long time to have to shut the doors of a business and face that reality every single day. They were the first and hardest hit, and they will take the longest to recover. The majority of them are ineligible to receive the funding this government pretended to put up.

As I said, small businesses are the backbone of our state. They are run by local families, mums and dads, fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters. They provide our local jobs and, at the end of the day, they are Western Australians who deserve to have their back covered by their state government. That is why I am standing here today, calling on the Premier and the Minister for Small Business to immediately provide a COVID-19 grant for small businesses

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of up to \$10 000, as all other state governments across Australia have done, because behind every business is a family that has to pay their bills.

MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman) [4.55 pm]: I stand in support of the member for Darling Range and the motion she has moved today on the lack of support for small businesses that has been provided by the Western Australian state government. It is without question an undisputed fact that the McGowan government has provided the lowest level of support for households and businesses of any state in Australia. It is an undisputed fact that it has under-delivered for the people of Western Australia, and what it has promised has proved to be a lot of smoke and mirrors. We do not have to look much further past rent relief and some of its payroll tax programs to see that although the government spruiks a large number and says it is supporting people, no-one can access that support; very few people can actually access it. There is a lot of smoke and mirrors in what the government has promised, but even what it did promise was the smallest level of state government support for households and businesses in Australia.

Let us have a closer look at some of the economic indicators that the Western Australian business community is currently facing. The problem with the McGowan government's Minister for Small Business is that he does not understand the consequences of poor policy decisions. Some of the policies that this minister has supported have had detrimental impacts on small businesses in Western Australia. Let us look at households. Members might sit there and say, "What do household prices have to do with small businesses?" They have everything to do with small businesses. Small businesses rely on the equity in their homes to actually finance their operations, and in Western Australia there has been a continual decline in housing values for 100 per cent of this term of the McGowan government. It is fascinating that the Treasurer has, in fact, misled this Parliament by stating that 60 per cent of the fall in household prices happened under the previous government. In fact, 60 per cent of the fall in household prices has actually occurred under the McGowan government.

At one point the median house price in Western Australia was above that of New South Wales. Nobody in their right mind thought it was realistic to expect that our housing prices would continue to grow above the median price in Sydney; we would not expect that. But, at this point, the median house price in Perth has fallen below that of Adelaide, and is nearly \$50 000 less than that of Hobart. We have had a 21.8 per cent decrease in housing values since a peak in 2014. That decrease is actually restricting small businesses from getting up and operating. What is this government doing about it? It actually put policies in place to put downward demand on housing. As housing values continue to fall, small businesses have less equity in their houses to be able to start up or even finance their businesses.

The government might say, "Oh, it's not our fault; it's not us. It's whatever the reason may be." I am saying right here and right now that the policies of the McGowan government have contributed to the erosion of housing values in Western Australia and made life even more difficult for small businesses in Western Australia. Let us have a look at a couple of them to highlight the point. One was the change in regional migration status, which went on the political line "local jobs for local kids". No-one in this room would disagree with that. When it comes to local jobs, we all want to put our kids first and foremost. But when the government changed the regional migration status, there was no reduction in the number of people immigrating into Western Australia from overseas. The same number of people came through, but the international students bypassed Western Australia and went to South Australia and Tasmania. Those states' domestic economies started to spike but ours kept going down. Our market share of international students, which Australia-wide in the 2018–19 financial year was a \$37.5 billion industry, dropped from seven and a half per cent to five and a half per cent. That was a reduction of opportunity in Western Australia and it decreased the state demand. Our domestic economy lost \$750 million per annum. It was the equivalent of 12 000 students, who would have sought accommodation. In fact, under the rules, their parents could buy properties in their names. Losing those students put a downward demand in the property sector.

The government brought in a foreign buyers' surcharge. At the time, as the shadow Treasurer, I pleaded with the Treasurer to defer it. We were not against the principle of a foreign buyers' surcharge, but, given the state of the domestic economy and the housing industry in Western Australia, it was not the time to introduce it. We pleaded with the Treasurer and, as an opposition, we were accused of putting the interests of foreign investors ahead of Western Australians. What a joke! We warned the government that the surcharge would strip further demand out of the housing sector at a time when the housing industry was on its knees—and what happened? Housing prices fell further and faster. In 2019, we saw the largest fall in housing prices since they started declining. The median house price went down around nine per cent in 2019.

These are the government's policies. Government members sit there saying, "Oh, it's not our fault. Oh, we've changed it. Oh, we've still collected foreign buyers' surcharge that we wouldn't have otherwise." But the government has not measured the amount of stamp duty that it has lost or the rebates it has given back to foreign buyers. The government has given more rebates to foreigners than what the foreign buyers' tax would be. For apartments costing less than \$720 000, the rebate is greater than what the foreign buyers' surcharge would be. The government has done that now, but it is all a little bit too late because the damage is done and we have already seen the dramatic fall in housing prices. At that point in time, the Premier was spruiking that we had bottomed out and that it was

the perfect time to go and buy a house. What great financial advice that was! I believe that if the Premier provides financial advice, he should be responsible for the losses that people are facing. He has taken no accountability for that decision. The Minister for Small Business—with the smug look on his face all the time in this chamber—has taken no responsibility for the damage that he has done to small businesses in Western Australia. That minister is a part of cabinet and he has to take responsibility for the decisions that he makes.

Taking housing prices another step further, we have now seen that one in five houses in Western Australia are in negative equity. One in five home owners owe more on their mortgage than the actual value of their property. How can they borrow against that to establish their small business? The government has taken away that opportunity. Under this McGowan government, people in Western Australia are financially worse off than the rest of Australia. People's net position is based on the value they have in their house. The Australian dream is to own your own house—that is what people take pride in—but the government has destroyed the value of people's net wealth. At the same time, government members sit there saying, "Oh, we're doing a great job. We're doing a great job." But they are ignoring these facts. Western Australians are financially worse off and it is not just in housing prices.

The member for Darling Range touched on the unemployment rate, which is now sitting at 8.3 per cent. This state is supposedly leading the nation in its attack on the coronavirus and we have the most relaxed environment in Australia, but we have the second highest unemployment rate in Western Australia's history. Wow, that is a proud achievement of the government! There are 62 400 fewer Australians employed than were employed pre-coronavirus. We have not had a community transmission since 11 April. We are now in mid-August and we still have not had a community transmission, yet our unemployment rate is the second highest in Australia.

These issues actually hurt small business. Of all the states in Australia, we have the biggest decline in wages growth during the coronavirus. In addition, during the previous three and a half years of the McGowan government, wages growth was the lowest of any state in Australia. These issues flow through and if members are wondering what this has to do with small business, it has everything to do with it because businesses cannot work under the restrictive policies of the state government and therefore cannot afford to pay people. We are seeing the weakest wages' growth for the entire period. In addition, business investment in Western Australia has declined every year under the McGowan government. Every year is worse than the previous year. The government members are saying, "Oh, look at us. Look at what we've achieved." But the government is not delivering for households or small businesses, and it is an absolute sham.

What other conditions has the government taken on to make small businesses hurt? In its first two years of government, it went hard on electricity prices and attacked the fixed component, which had an adverse impact on those who could least afford it and 20 000 small businesses experienced a 40 per cent increase in electricity charges. The smallest businesses were adversely impacted by these utility increases. We had a situation in which housing prices were falling and small business could not access its equity; utility prices increased dramatically, impacting on the viability of small businesses; and policies from the McGowan government adversely impacted on housing values and on small business to run effectively and efficiently—all these things had a detrimental effect on our domestic economy and small businesses in Western Australia. Therefore, it is more than reasonable that the member for Darling Range, who clearly pointed out the flaws in the policies and plans that the government has put in place, should appeal to the government to do what every other jurisdiction did in Australia. It should support our smallest businesses just like the other states have done for smallest businesses that are not paying payroll tax. We are talking about the smallest end of business, but it makes up the highest number of businesses in Western Australia. Small business owners have every right to feel aggrieved that the state government has not supported them—not one iota.

I want to take this one step further. Some businesses have been able to get up and get going and that is a blessing, but we want to see more effort from this government in putting support in place where there are restrictions. Small businesses in the agricultural sector are really concerned about getting people to work on the farms, to pick fruit and to harvest crops et cetera. Other jurisdictions in Australia are trying to work out how to keep their state or territory safe whilst trying to get people in to support small businesses. We are not seeing anything like that from this government to support small businesses. All it is saying is, "Our unemployment rate is high. Those people can go down there and work." It is not doing anything to work with industry and to support small businesses so that they can deliver on the opportunity that is coming with the current harvest.

Mr A. Krsticevic: They are telling the industry they should do it themselves. They don't want to help.

Mr D.C. NALDER: That is exactly right, member for Carine. They are ignoring the industry and leaving it to find its own way, while making it impossible for businesses to operate.

I close by saying that I fully support the motion put forward by the member for Darling Range. Western Australian small businesses deserve this government's support and, to date, it has been absent.

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MR K.M. O'DONNELL (Kalgoorlie) [5.10 pm]: I, too, would like to talk on this subject. I support the comments of the members for Bateman and Darling Range, calling on the McGowan Labor government to stop neglecting our hardworking Western Australian small and family-run businesses and to immediately provide a COVID-19 assistance grant of up to \$10 000 like all other governments across Australia have done, because every small business is a family.

Looking across the country, it clearly becomes apparent that Western Australia is lagging behind the other states in providing COVID-19 assistance grants to small and family-run businesses. New South Wales has a \$750 million small business grant program that helps businesses with fixed costs such as utilities and rent. Grants of \$3 000 are available to help small businesses safely reopen after COVID-19 to cover expenses such as marketing, advertising, fit-out changes, training, paying staff to work safely under current health conditions and financial advice. But to receive all that, they must be a small business or a not-for-profit organisation based in New South Wales, have an ABN and a turnover of more than \$75 000.

Queensland has made available through its small business COVID-19 adaption grant program \$100 million in small business grants for projects worth up to \$10 million. Businesses can apply to help pay for their operating costs, access digital technologies to rebuild business operations, upskill and reskill business owners and staff, and create or retain employment. It is also good to note that they are available specifically for regional small businesses located outside south east Queensland. There are various eligibility criteria, including that they must have been subject to closure or otherwise highly impacted by current shutdown restrictions, have experienced a minimum 30 per cent decline since 23 March 2020, and have an ABN, an annual turnover of \$75 000 and a payroll of less than \$1.3 million.

In South Australia, \$10 000 emergency one-off cash grants are available to businesses that are deemed to be highly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, or subject to closure. Obviously, they must meet set criteria to be eligible. Businesses must have an ABN, be carrying on a business within South Australia, be employing people in South Australia, have a turnover of more than \$75 000—which appears to be the benchmark for many states—and have a payroll of less than \$1.5 million.

The Northern Territory has a small business survival fund of \$50 million, which focuses on businesses in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Businesses can apply to be listed on the business hardship register, which allows them to waive or defer payment of payroll tax and reduce utility bills and rates when provided, and offers incentives for landlords. Again, eligible businesses must have an ABN.

Tasmania has the small business emergency support grants program to support small businesses such as companies involved in the seafood, tourism, accommodation, retail, hospitality, art, entertainment and fitness sectors. It also offers a small business hardship grant of \$15 000 to assist with the long-term impact on Tasmanian small businesses. Tasmania is a small state, yet it is offering \$15 000 to small businesses. It also has a \$5 000 small business sustainability and recovery grant program that offers grants of up to \$3 000 to sustain small businesses across a number of sectors so that they can recover, reopen, build capacity and innovate in these challenging times. Eligible businesses, too, must have an ABN and, in this instance, an annual turnover of more than \$50 000.

Victoria has a business support fund expansion program, which offers one-off grants of \$5 000. Again, businesses must have an ABN, be registered for GST, employ people and be registered with WorkSafe Victoria.

As for Western Australia, it has the small business relief package of \$17 500 for eligible businesses, the criteria for which states that it is only for small businesses with a payroll between \$1 million and \$4 million. How many small businesses meet that criteria? Certainly not those in my electorate that are struggling. None of the eligibility criteria for the other states' programs is attainable in WA. Many other states have set their payroll criteria at just above \$75 000. That is what we are looking at—small businesses, not businesses with a payroll in excess of \$1 million.

I was talking to one business owner who said that the \$17 500 is great. He pays \$12 000 in payroll tax, but got \$17 500! That is fantastic. But if someone pays \$50 000 in payroll tax, they get only \$17 500 on the same formula. Also, if a business is just above the payroll tax threshold and pays \$500 in payroll tax, they will get \$17 500. The worst case is for businesses that are just under the threshold and are not paying payroll tax; they do not get anything. I know that we have to draw a line in the sand somewhere, but in this instance the government has put the threshold at between \$1 million and \$4 million. There is nothing for small businesses with turnovers of \$75 000. We want them to be included.

It is estimated that 10 700 businesses are eligible for that \$17 500, which is only 4.7 per cent of small to medium-sized businesses. A business with a payroll of up to \$4 million is heading towards being a medium business. I do not classify that as a small business.

I was at a playgroup the other day and it got \$2 500 for its electricity bill. That is fantastic, but we really need to be looking after small businesses. It is said that there is no need to apply for the \$17 500 grant; it will be automatically sent to all qualifying businesses. If we are going to look after small business, I do not think anybody would begrudge people applying for it. There is one for job employment. A business can get people on the books and, when people apply, they can start going through all the applications. That is an improvement for employment.

I was speaking to a local travel agent, who arguably would be in the one industry that has been most affected by the pandemic. I was disappointed to find that a travel business must be a member of certain associations to receive assistance. Blind Freddy knows how affected they are. They get nothing. They need an accessible support package now, not when it is too late. They are selling the family home just to pay the bills.

Also, there is a husband and wife who own a newsagent across the road from my office. They start their day at three in the morning delivering newspapers. They open their shop at 6.00 am and close it at 6.00 pm. Then they stay on to finish any paperwork and to prepare for the next day. They said that they do not normally get home until seven at night. They end up working anywhere between 15 and 17 hours a day. They close on Sundays. When I asked them what a \$10 000 grant would do for them, they said lots. It would mean that they could employ someone to help out and to give them a break. It could go towards making the storefront more attractive to entice customers and putting in more shelving so that they could sell more things to make more money and to improve their bottom line.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Yes.

Mr P. Papalia: They've got a lot of money.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: They have got a lot of money.

Mr P. Papalia: You should ask them what we've done for them.

Mr K.M. O'DONNELL: Okay, I will the next time I go in.

Then we have Ruby and Long, a Vietnamese couple who own and run a bakery in Maritana Street. Again, they are very hardworking. Long starts in the early evening and works all night. He does his deliveries in the morning and then helps out in the shop. Ruby comes in in the early hours of the morning to help. Their mother, Manoi—I refer to her as Manoi from Hanoi—looks after their triplets. Ruby first had triplets and then she had another child. She has four kids who are in their early years at school and that family is doing it very tough. An extra \$10 000 could help them to employ someone to help out, or they could do up their shopfront and a few other things to entice people into their shop.

Aaron, Ben and Brendan own the Miners Rest Motel, a family-run overland hotel. They have seen a dramatic drop in revenue since COVID started. They were catering for tourists, fly in, fly out workers and others and it has been a struggle for them. I spoke with Aaron recently and asked what a grant would do to help his business. He said that it would be fantastic; it would absolutely help. He said that their hotel price rates have been the same for eight years and a grant would help to promote the business and get people in, especially from the tourism sector. Although their overheads have not disappeared, their paying customers have. If they have any increase in costs, it is because of all the extra measures they had to implement just to be able to trade. A small business grant would really help a business like theirs.

Mark, Marisol and their kids run Freerange Supplies, a camping, fishing and firearms shop. They work very long hours and, again, this is a family-run business that would benefit from having some financial assistance to not only help them through these challenging times, but also promote and encourage people to come to their shop.

I agree with the other members who suggested that an immediate one-off payment could be offered to small businesses with a turnover above \$75 000, like the other states have provided, and that criteria should apply; I do not begrudge that. I would even go further to say that regional businesses should be given a higher amount if they can put the money towards employing someone from a non-regional area to move to a region and work in that business. For example, a one-off payment of \$10 000 could be provided for small business to relocate people. We need more people in the regions. I remember the Premier saying earlier this week that people should consider moving to the regions for work instead of working in just the metropolitan areas. We need small business grants to ensure that regional small businesses thrive. If a grant can assist in bringing others to the regions, it is a win for all.

I keep hearing about how great the mining industry is: how it has kept the country running and people employed and how so much money is coming in because of that industry. Let us use some of that money to help the businesses that support our mining towns. Am I being cynical when I think that that money might be being kept for something else in the budget? Hopefully, the government is not storing the money away just to make the budget look good. People would understand it if the government told them that it has used some money prior to the budget. I am sure that the government would not want to be labelled as Scrooge McDuck, having a vault full of coins.

I want to touch on just a couple of issues around government assistance. The one-off payment of \$2 500 for those customers consuming less than 50 megawatts of electricity per annum was very good. I am not going to bag and bag the government; if it does something good, I will acknowledge it. I would like the government to revisit the tourism recovery grant and consider some of the tour operators who did not fall under the criteria and how they could be assisted. The one-off payroll tax grant of \$17 500 to help those businesses with an annual payroll of \$1 million

is good—it helps that group of businesses—but it does not help the small family-run businesses. It would be great if the minister could revisit that grant.

Finally—some of the other members have mentioned this—as of 19 August, 62 500 jobs have been lost since February this year. We now have 8 700 fewer full-time jobs than we did in March 2017. Currently, 119 700 Western Australians are unemployed and the unemployment rate is 8.3 per cent, the second highest in Australia. We have 67 000 people on JobKeeper. If we did not have JobKeeper, our unemployment rate could skyrocket anywhere up to 13 per cent. Thank you, minister. I appreciate your time.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [5.25 pm]: Back in 2017, when the Minister for Small Business; Tourism got his portfolios, he would have thought: “You beauty! Minister for good times! I have tourism and small business; this is going to be easy!” What a change of fate. Tourism and small business have become the two most important portfolio areas in the state government. What we have here, in his own words, is a mediocre, midrange minister when it comes to tourism and small business—who is not respected in those industries.

Mr P. Papalia: That’s a bit harsh. That’s a bit of a stretch—come on!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: We are meant to tell the truth in this place. As I travel around and meet with organisations such as the Tourism Council Western Australia or the visitor centres, tourism groups or small businesses, or whether I am speaking to people in Kalbarri or Broome or out in the bush in Cue or Meekatharra, the common theme is that this government has left small businesses adrift. This government is riding on the popularity of the Premier to get it through, and it has no plan for small businesses and tourism businesses in Western Australia. The plan is to Wander out Yonder, a campaign hatched on the east coast—taxpayers’ money gone to the east coast, employees on the east coast, but the Buy Local campaign is going well! We all know where the Buy Local campaigns is: it is not here, it is over east!

When it comes to priorities for tourism and small business, it is fate that the borders have closed. We have to commend the Premier for his strong stance on the borders, which continues, but it has meant that people have no choice but to travel around Western Australia. We could have had any slogan to encourage people to travel to these places! But that aside, our regional towns such as Kalbarri, Shark Bay, Coral Bay, Exmouth and many others are under pressure because they cannot find workers. If they can find workers, they cannot find workers’ accommodation. The Premier’s response is: “Just go to regional WA. Get a couch. Lie somewhere. You’re young enough!” Well, yes, I think we all acknowledge that that does suit some elements of the population, but we need a plan. How do we attract 18 to 25-year-olds to regional WA? The campaign should be: “Go Bush! Go and have a gap year”, because we need a plan to convince our 18 to 25-year-olds—those who will go to university but who generally first go overseas and have a gap year—to have a gap year in regional WA.

That sounds all very well and sensible and logical, but we have to place them. If they work in hospitality, they can go up the road and work on a plantation, but we have to show them the seasonality that exists in regional WA to enable them to be employed over the 12 months. They may be able to work in Kalbarri for three months, go to Carnarvon for three months, and then all the way to the Kimberley for another three months. They could have that opportunity to be employed for 12 months so they can enjoy regional Western Australia and see the sites. They can go to Mount Augustus, the biggest rock in Australia. They can go to Ningaloo Reef. They can go to the skywalk at Kalbarri. They can go fishing. They can go camping. They can go surfing—all those things that people do when they go overseas, they actually can do in Western Australia. But we have to sell it. We have to entice people and get them out. Perhaps the \$10 000 grant the member for Darling Range has advocated for small business can be used to entice workers from Perth to the regions. Perhaps that is one way of enticing them. We must be able to assist small businesses to pay for accommodation, which has gone through the roof. A lack of accommodation means that prices have gone up. People cannot find accommodation even if they want to visit a lot of those places, so there is a problem there. We could offset some of those costs.

The government can be judged on closing the borders and keeping us safe. Yes; I think we would all put up our hand and acknowledge that. However, the real test is to assist our community, assist small businesses and assist the tourism businesses. How do we do that? That is the true test of the government. It has to come up with a campaign, but not just a slogan. The government has to come up with a way it can work. It must educate the community that people can have 12 months of employment if they go from one place in Western Australia to another.

There needs to be a longer-term plan. We all know that the international borders are not going to open any time soon. We do not know when the interstate borders will open up. Even if interstate borders open up in, say, July next year, people will come here in droves, which will put more pressure on small businesses; more pressure on Exmouth, Coral Bay, Shark Bay, Carnarvon and Kalbarri and inland to Meekatharra, Cue and the Kimberley, because everyone will be travelling everywhere. All of those areas will be under pressure so there needs to be a long-term plan by the government other than just saying that it kept us safe. No, no, no—now is the time to start planning. When we put questions on notice about the \$5 billion recovery plan, there is smoke and mirrors and sleight of hand. For example, as I mentioned today, \$2 500 is going to Horizon Power customers in regional Western Australia, but there is a 10.6 per cent increase on lighting for local governments.

Mr D.T. Redman: Give with one hand and take with the other.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Yes, and here we go. It is not just that, but small businesses and community groups have all been bit with an increase. The government says, "Oh no, we had that planned." The plan is that we are all in this together. It does not seem like that.

We have those charges and then there is sleight of hand and smoke and mirrors. Out of the \$5 billion, around \$1.3 billion—I could be wrong—is from future charges. Take that away. Future charges? That is not aiding recovery. That is not, "We are all in this together." That is saying, "One day I am going to do this." That is not recovery. What is concerning is how much money has actually been spent. How much money has hit the ground? Members will find that little has hit the ground and that there are no time frames on a lot of the projects that have been announced—no time frames. This may play out in due course, once the budget is handed down and we are able to scrutinise what is going on. However, what we know at present and what we know will hit our businesses hard come school holidays, Christmas, next year and potentially the year after, is that our small businesses are under huge stress.

The owner of a hotel in Broome called me to say that his chef had worked 26 days straight. He had a day off and went to pick up a car in Derby. He picked up his car but was so tired that he crashed it. The reaction by the people who went to his rescue was, "How the hell did you survive that crash?" He was absolutely exhausted. Nearly every small business has a similar story. Last week in this house the minister mentioned that the owners of Finlay's in Kalbarri were being innovative and had rented a house. Yes, they have been fortunate that they can do that, but they cannot get workers. Even if businesses are fortunate enough to be able to rent a house, they still cannot get workers.

We need a campaign. Yes, we need a slogan. "Go Bush" is a slogan. Go north, go east, go south —

Mr D.T. Redman: Go yonder!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Go yonder! I like that, member for Warren–Blackwood. I am going to steal that slogan from you!

Go yonder: 18 to 25-year-olds should go and have a gap year. We need a plan more than a slogan from the Labor government. Businesses need some assistance with accommodation and potentially relocation costs. How do we attract those workers to go yonder; to go out bush and help our regional towns?

We should not say it is about only the 18 to 25-year-olds. There are seniors who are already travelling around in their caravan. They are happy to work a few hours' a day, whether in Cue or elsewhere in the north. Wherever—they are happy to do it. What discussions has the government had with the federal government to change the way our seniors think about this, to be able to fill a void? How can they earn a little more money? These are the types of discussions that I expect government members to have with their federal counterparts—coming up with solutions to a problem that is crippling our businesses and which ultimately cripples our tourism product. If people cannot get a meal or they have to wait two hours for food, or they cannot get into their hotel room at two o'clock and have to wait until seven o'clock because there is no-one to clean the room, or they wait half an hour to have a beer because the line is long, that is an issue. They are the problems that small businesses face, particularly in regional Western Australia.

The Minister for Tourism thought this was an easy portfolio: "Yes, I have won lotto!" The minister for good times has turned out to have one of the most important portfolio areas for this state in this critical time and we are not seeing any action. We saw the bungle with the \$14 million to assist small businesses, then we read the fine print that said they had to be a member of the Tourism Council or another regional tourism organisation, but they could not be a member of the industry they belonged to. If they are the caravan industry or a hotel association, their accreditation does not matter. Perhaps the minister can talk about how many businesses actually access that \$6 500. How many businesses missed out that could have done with that \$6 500? It will be interesting to see who gets the other \$4 million, I think it is, for larger grants. It was \$14 million to assist our tourism industry, back when they had no tourists. It is not business as usual because the government opened the regional borders and allowed people to travel. It is not business as usual. People are still reliant on JobKeeper. One of the issues is that JobSeeker discourages people from going to work. I know that changes in September, but we will see how that affects our small businesses and their ability to employ people.

What is the government doing to deal with some of those issues? What conversations have ministers had with their federal counterparts? The mental health of a lot of small business people is at breaking point. Businesses are closing their doors. The Potshot Hotel Resort is packed but it is closing its doors one night a week. Grace's Tavern in Exmouth is closing its doors one night a week. Businesses in Kalbarri and Shark Bay are doing the same so that they can take a break, because they have no staff. All I hear from members opposite is bizarre. This is the reality. When I first started speaking tonight, I said that not many people respect the minister because of his smug, arrogant view of how small businesses and tourism businesses are operating.

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

Mr P. Papalia: I thought that was a bit unkind.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: No. The minister has no understanding of the pressure that businesses are under, particularly in regional WA.

Mr P. Papalia: So what have you done?

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Actions speak louder than words, minister. The actions coming from the minister are zilch. They are doughnuts. The minister could help small businesses by making sure that they have workers and that the workers have accommodation. The government should build some workers' accommodation. That is what we did when we were in government. It took the pressure off Karratha and Coral Bay. I am glad the minister is in here. We built a \$17.5 million 70-bed facility in Coral Bay for workers' accommodation. It is now due for the next lot because businesses cannot expand to cater for the public. That is why some further beds need to be put there.

One other issue for the Treasurer and the ministers who are present is the influx of people to places like Exmouth and Coral Bay. I will pick those two towns. There can be potentially 20 000-plus people in Exmouth, while Coral Bay can have 6 000 to 8 000 people. A volunteer ambulance service is meant to look after all those people. Small business owners are run off their feet. Coral Bay, for example, does not even have a four-wheel-drive ambulance. If there is an accident down at Warroora or anywhere along the coastline, they have to use their own ute. We hear stories about someone having perished, and they have had to put them on a board, put them in the back of the ute and drive them to the road, where they can get the normal ambulance to pick them up and take them away. There can be 6 000 to 8 000 people in Coral Bay but no police, because there is no police accommodation. It costs thousands and thousands of dollars for police to go to Coral Bay, and that takes police away from Exmouth, which has 20 000-plus people.

Several members interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: I heard the comment, "Eight and a half years to do something." We actually did something. However, an influx of people is putting pressure on all the services. The sewage ponds cannot cope with the number of people in Exmouth. This pressure is occurring. The government talks about the recovery plan, but where the recovery is occurring, there is no plan; there are only slogans about keeping the borders closed and Clive Palmer. It is smoke and mirrors and a sleight of hand. The Minister for Tourism; Small Business is incompetent, because he laughs at the challenges that regional communities and businesses are facing. As I said, in Coral Bay, the volunteer ambulance service is catering for 8 000 people, small businesses are under pressure and there is no police presence. Yes, there are two nurses there, but I tell members what: if they get hurt along the coastline up north in WA, they will be in serious trouble, not because of a lack of volunteers who want to save them, but because there is a lack of support from the government. The volunteers are fundraising to get a four-wheel-drive ambulance for Coral Bay, but the government cannot even come to the rescue. Clearly, we have a fundamental problem here. The road to recovery does not include our regional towns. It does not include the vital infrastructure that we need to be able to keep their constituents—Perth constituents—safe when they visit the north.

I urge the minister to represent the portfolio areas he is in charge of and become a champion of small business and tourism businesses. He should do what they are pleading with him to do—that is, represent them. He should fight for them. He should get a blood nose. He might not get it right all the time, but he should give it a crack, because people's lives are being put at risk because of mental health issues and the lack of services in regional WA. I support this motion because we need to do more for our small businesses, particularly in regional WA.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse) [5.45 pm]: I rise in support of the motion presented by the member for Darling Range and mirror the comments of the member for North West Central by calling on the Minister for Tourism; Small Business to represent those businesses in regional WA. Further to that, we are once again calling on this government to be a government for all Western Australians, and not just for those in Labor seats. The motion reads —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to stop neglecting our hardworking Western Australian small and family-run businesses by immediately providing a COVID-19 assistance grant to COVID-19 affected small businesses of up to \$10 000, like all other governments have done across Australia, because behind every small business is a family.

That very worthy motion has been put forward by the member for Darling Range. When COVID-19 became a significant issue back in March, businesses obediently responded to the obvious restrictions that were required in response to the health crisis we faced. Many shut their doors. Since then, they have followed the necessary restrictions. Governments have responded with some assistance for small businesses, but state government assistance in Western Australia has fallen well short of what has been provided in other states. In fact, when it comes to the financial support that has been provided to small businesses in this state, many businesses would point to the great financial assistance provided at a federal level by the Morrison government in the form of JobSeeker and JobKeeper, but when it comes to state government assistance, many small businesses have been left wanting. That is because

a dedicated stimulus for small businesses has been absent. The member for Darling Range has been advocating for that very strongly, with a lot of support for her online petition as well. There has been a tourism recovery fund, but that package is available to only 1 600 businesses across the state. There has been an appeal from this side of the house and many small businesses as well to expand the criteria beyond the operators who are accredited with the Tourism Council Western Australia or Australia's South West. There are 2 700 businesses in the south west, so the fact that this program targets only 1 600 businesses across the whole state illustrates the level of the shortfall.

The payroll tax benefit grant has been very much welcomed as well, but in the tourism sector, which has been heavily hit during this period, small businesses with a turnover of less than \$1 million, such as cafes, restaurants, retailers and sole traders, have not been eligible. I will read some comments from a couple of small business operators in my electorate. One is from a travel agent, and it should be of no surprise to anyone on this side of the house, or to many of the other states across the nation that recognise the need to support the travel industry. I quote Anita Ness of Helloworld who states —

The travel industry and in particular travel agents were the very first to be hit with the impact of the COVID-19 crisis in most cases at least 6 weeks before any other industry felt the financial effects and we will very likely be the absolute last to recover considering there is no immediate plans to open interstate or international borders which is our entire business.

Travel agents have no way of offering an alternate way to operate a viable financial business in this environment, put simply we only sell travel and this has been completely halted. Our agency has experienced a 100% downturn in the past 4 months we have nil income and in fact in some cases are having commissions clawed back from us that were earned for work on bookings already undertaken 8–10 months ago that we have already spent the hours doing the work, paying our staff, paying our rent, paying our taxes and then this earnings is clawed back with suppliers cancellations.

Anne Johnston of the Comfort Inn Busselton River Resort states that she is not eligible for the funding package. She was a member of the Australian Tourism Industry Association until recently, but it was cost prohibitive and provided no return on her investment. She has been in business for 15 years and annually provided complimentary accommodation to visitor centres for events such as WA Iron Man. Despite years of supporting the industry, she is not eligible for the tourism recovery package. I might also point out that Anne Johnston of the Busselton River Resort was not eligible for any assistance with her energy usage. In light of her energy costs and the government's announcement about the \$2 500 credit for small businesses in that state, she writes —

Whilst this is a great initiative and will provide much needed support to many businesses and organisations, it does not cover off on many small businesses who are deemed ineligible because of the Tariff they are charged by Synergy.

She states further on —

Because we are on the R3 Tariff, even though we are a small business, we are ineligible for the credit. The reason we are on the R3 Tariff is because we consume more than 50 MWh/annum of power.

According to Synergy, once an organisation consumes more than that, it is automatically “migrated”. Her business consumes so much power because she is an accommodation supplier. Necessarily, as part of that model as a tourism operator, she does not get that level of support. We have written to government at ministerial level but, unfortunately, she has been unsuccessful for that support, as well as being unsuccessful as a small business operator under the so-called tourism support packages that have been promoted by this government.

We know the tourism industry has been dealt a significant hit during this period. It lost more than \$3 billion or more than 30 000 jobs, and six months' worth of bookings were cancelled. Overall, tourism has seen a 26 per cent hit since about this time last year. Admittedly, compared with other regions, the south west region has done reasonably well, with growth of six per cent due to the increase in tourist numbers.

Mr P. Papalia: Where are these numbers from?

Ms L. METTAM: From the Tourism Council of WA.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Ms L. METTAM: Yes. That is genuine feedback. I think it is quite clear and true that the state government does not have a dedicated package of support for our small businesses. Stories are true from operators who are not eligible for any level of support, whether it is Anne Johnston of the Busselton River Resort or others from the travel agents industry. There is some concern. The figures do not lie. There is high unemployment in the state at the moment, well above the national level, and it is the second highest in the country. The real unemployment rate is significantly more than 8.3 per cent. Our tourism regions are really hurting.

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

In addition to the comments about the dedicated stimulus, I would like to again touch on a point I made at the very beginning of this speech—that is, that we need to see a government for all of Western Australia. We want to see a Minister for Tourism who is a minister for every region and every tourism region. Unfortunately, when we look at investment in tourism, we have seen some really poor examples in this space of the level of support in the electorate of Vasse or the broader Margaret River region. An injection of \$150 million of investment into the tourism industry that was announced recently was welcome. However, it was disappointing that no funding was provided for the Australian Underwater Discovery Centre project. As the minister may be aware, the Busselton jetty has been named WA's major tourism attraction for the last two years. It is the most popular paid tourist destination outside Perth, beating only Perth Zoo. There is a real opportunity here to match some funding that has been provided at the federal level to support a \$30 million project for a world-class facility that will make the underwater observatory the largest in the world. It would support the Busselton Airport project, a project, I might add, that the minister called “a pup”, which is quite insulting from a Minister for Tourism.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Ms L. METTAM: It would help the project to expand. We thought the minister was an advocate for regional aviation, but it is quite clearly only for other areas. It is disappointing because Jetstar was committed to those flights, and it is ambitious.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister has missed the point. I am talking about the comments made by the Minister for Tourism well before the pandemic. We look forward to some support and to Jetstar getting on board and perhaps some renewed support for this project to bring flights from Melbourne to Busselton well after the COVID crisis is over.

In relation to picking winners and the fact that this is not a minister for all Western Australia, I point to a letter I wrote to him in July regarding CinefestOZ. He commented on the Shinju Matsuri Festival most recently when I raised the issue about the festival. The McGowan government has been, rightly, applauded for its health response to the COVID pandemic, but quite clearly there are issues around support for small business. It is fantastic to see that CinefestOZ will be one of the first major tourism events to be delivered here in regional WA and WA as a whole. This year, unfortunately, there is no funding for the major prize. Acknowledging and accepting the challenges that have come as a result of COVID-19, the team has worked very hard to fit in as the restrictions have been adjusted. On 28 July 2020, I wrote to the Minister for Small Business. As the lucrative festival prize, which is Australia's richest, was no longer on offer, I asked whether there was an opportunity for \$100 000 to be provided to promote the event with digital marketing to target social media and traditional media. That funding was requested because the team at CinefestOZ had a very limited lead time in which to promote the event. The film prize that is associated with the event, which is Australia's richest, had been given up this year because it was not known what level of restrictions would be in place. Given that the team had shifted its plans with the changing restrictions in support of the government and had worked very hard to deliver a program of 40 live events, which were scheduled between Busselton and Margaret River, it was disappointing that the answer was simply no. In his response, the minister wrote —

As you state, I understand the event is now principally a virtual/live event with limited real screenings and live events to be held from 25–30 August 2020. I both acknowledge and empathise with the challenging times the events industry is facing due to the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The minister's reply went on to state that that had been relayed to the chair and the CEO. It is disappointing that this letter indicates that it has not been spelt out to the minister that CinefestOZ had planned live events, which would support small businesses across the region. Although, in April and May, the focus of the event was limited because of permitted crowd numbers, with the restrictions changing, the focus changed. This is a program that supports Orana Cinemas, the Esplanade Hotel, the Equinox restaurant, Margaret River HEART, the Eagle Bay Brewing Company, the Rose Hotel and, of course, many other businesses. The festival supports small businesses and was seeking only \$100 000 in support, which would have indirectly supported those other small businesses across the region. The event has received funding in support of not only its events goal and tourism goal, but also the educational benefits it provides. In addition, Indigifest provides broad community benefits.

Those are two examples of what I stated at the start of my contribution; that is, we are not seeing a government for all of Western Australia. Most importantly, we are not seeing genuine support for our small businesses across the board, which is the theme of the motion we are speaking in support of today. Western Australia has seen the lowest level of support for small businesses in the country, with no dedicated stimulus package for small businesses. That is at a time when we have the second worst unemployment rate in the nation. That is why we on this side of the house support the member for Darling Range in her efforts to see a dedicated support package of up to \$10 000 introduced for our small businesses. It is a commendable motion, which this side of the house thoroughly supports.

Mr S.K. L'Estrange: Mr Acting Speaker!

Mr P. Papalia: Mr Acting Speaker!

The ACTING SPEAKER: The minister has the call. Member for Churchlands, we will go back and forth.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Small Business) [6.05 pm]: There is no need to. We have heard from the opposition for two hours. I think that is more than adequate. There has been a lot of repetition of not much substance. At the outset, I will say that in the highly unlikely event that any small business owner has had the tenacity to have endured the excruciating contributions that we have had to submit ourselves to over the last two hours, I extend to them thanks, yet again, on behalf of the state government and the Premier for their forbearance and willingness to sacrifice self-interest on behalf of their fellow citizens. They have made a contribution, like the rest of Western Australians, towards ensuring that the response to COVID-19 in Western Australia has been the equal of any in Australia. In fact, I believe that it has been easily the best. It is probably the equal of any response in the world. That can be attributed to the fine leadership that we have witnessed and the great governance system that we enjoy and, above all, the willingness of Western Australians, in particular small businesses, to make that sacrifice of self-interest and support this government's measures to combat the threat of COVID-19. If any small business owners have been able to sustain themselves by perhaps going away from the live feed for some time and coming back at this important moment, I again convey my thanks and that of the government for their contribution.

I am confused by the contributions, which is not surprising. I am not necessarily easily confused, but it is almost as though we in Western Australia exited isolation and lockdown, but the members of the Liberal Party stayed in lockdown. They are still back there in the darkened room, with all the windows shut and the television off. They are telling us that things are dire, that businesses are going to the wall all over the state and that the Western Australian government should be creating a \$10 000 gift for every small business in the state. With there being around 226 000 small businesses in the state, that would equate to more than \$2 billion being given to people who are currently in the best —

Several members interjected.

MR P. PAPALIA: The member for Darling Range is on three strikes. I would be very careful if I were her. Does she want to see the end of this debate or does she want to leave? The Acting Speaker will call her because I am not inviting interjections.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

MR P. PAPALIA: There are almost 230 000 small businesses in Western Australia that are enjoying the most open economy in the nation. Just quietly, I will tell the Liberal Party of Western Australia that if people were in Melbourne right now, it would not matter how big the grant was from the state government for their small business, because they would not have a small business. That is a terrible tragedy; it is a very sad thing. They would not have a small business right now because they would be shut. That is the reality! Any number of thousands of dollars of grants could be on the table. I will come to that in a moment and tell some truths about the observations and claims made by members of the opposition about small business grants. People in Tasmania are able to go outside, but there is no business because there are only a few hundred thousand people in Tasmania. That is all it has. It does not have a manufacturing industry, a mining industry or a construction industry to speak of, as we have here in Western Australia. It does not have that. People do not have the income or capacity to spend that people have in Western Australia. We did not shut down our key, crucial businesses. The Premier fought off the demands of the Liberal states and others on the east coast to shut down mining in Western Australia. We insisted that we would keep vital industries open and we are sustaining the nation because of it. As a consequence, Western Australian small businesses are now enjoying the most open and liberal environment in the country for business, and they are benefiting from that, because people have certainty, employment and the capacity to spend. I know this because I have gone and personally met with hundreds of small businesses over the last three weeks. I have sat across the counter from them and sat at roundtable meetings in the Kimberley, Geraldton and Kalbarri. I have walked door-to-door to hundreds of businesses, and I know that the outrageous claims that have been made by the member for Darling Range are false.

Yes, some people are doing it tough; that is true. On the only matter of any substance to speak of in the contribution made by the member for Darling Range, she referred to travel agents. After making claims about the collapse of the entire small business sector in Western Australia, she talked about travel agents and quoted Christine Ross-Davies—that is her name, not Christine Ross. The member obviously has not met her, has she? When did she meet with her?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): Minister, if you could talk through the Chair.

MR P. PAPALIA: No, I am inviting an interjection now. When did the member actually meet with her? She has not met with her, because she is solely reading from contributions —

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister! Just so I can have some clarification, you said earlier that you did not want to seek interjections. What would you like to do?

Mr P. PAPALIA: I will continue, thank you.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I take it that you are not seeking any more interjections?

Mr P. PAPALIA: No, no more, because —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Then please speak through the Chair.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Christine is a wonderful person and she is doing it really tough. All travel agents have been impacted by the federal government's action in shutting the international borders. Ninety per cent of Western Australian travel agents' revenue comes from Western Australians flying out of WA, travelling overseas—not even interstate, but overseas—for cruises and visits to other nations, and that has been stopped by the pandemic and the federal government's correct action in shutting down international travel. That is not a state government matter. However, I have met with Christine three times now and I am full of empathy, concern and sympathy for the plight of travel agents. I support Western Australian travel agents, and Christine knows that because I have facilitated and assisted her to have a meeting with the Premier to discuss the issue. She has met with the Premier twice, and so has Joe Francis. The problem is that the travel agents' situation is a result of the pandemic.

I have written to the federal Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Minister Birmingham, and I spoke to him today on the phone. I have asked him to match our tourism survival grants package, but unfortunately the federal government will not do that. He has indicated that the response from the federal government is the JobKeeper and JobSeeker spend. That is a significant thing, and it is wonderful that the federal government responded in that manner, and I thank it for that. After we wrote to the minister—I am sure we were not the only ones—the federal government announced an extension of JobKeeper and JobSeeker, at diminishing rates. There are now more criteria and more robust measures for eligibility attached to those programs, and rightfully so, in my opinion. That will be coming into play from September onwards, and extending out to March.

The suggestion that the state government has done nothing for any particular sector, but especially for travel agents, is not correct. All of the 300 shopfronts the member for Darling Range referred to have benefited from our code of conduct for commercial tenancies. We have compelled landlords to negotiate and provide some respite for commercial tenancies, initially for a six-month period, and we are working on that measure to potentially be extended. I feel that travel agents are the one particular part of the small business sector that will be most impacted for a long time.

There are other parts of the sector. Next month, the events sector will benefit from the most open economy in the country, with a lot of support from the state government and a lot of enthusiastic assistance from the Minister for Culture and the Arts. The Getting the Show Back on the Road campaign will be kicking in from 2 September, which will be beneficial for events operators and performers. However, there are still some parts of the sector that will be doing it tough. I understand that big city hotels have suffered from the loss of around 85 per cent of their revenue stream that comes from interstate business travel, but we are not going to sacrifice the safety of Western Australians and the ability to have the most open economy in the country for a vast number of other businesses in the state by allowing community transmission of COVID-19 to come in from the markets that those businesses normally rely on. That is the sad fact; the health and safety of Western Australians will be the priority. No matter how many times the Western Australian Liberal Party calls for us to drop the borders, we will take our advice from the Chief Health Officer and other appropriate authorities. That is a fact.

I will leave some time for some of my colleagues who are very enthusiastically waiting for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, but I want to address the fallacies, falsehoods and inaccuracies peddled in this motion and by the many members who have already made contributions on the subject of grants. Firstly, the member for Darling Range misled the Parliament by suggesting that I had said that no other state has a \$10 000 grants scheme. I have never said such a thing. Had she bothered to do some research, she would have been able to confirm that fact. I have never said that. However, I will take a moment to educate her and other members of the Liberal Party who fell into the trap of believing that the member for Darling Range had bothered to do any research at all.

Every jurisdiction has had a different response; we have the best in the country, I think. We have the most open economy; people are back at work. That is the biggest contributing policy that we can apply to this challenge. However, when other jurisdictions announce \$10 000 grant schemes—members have listed the criteria—do members opposite think that every single small business in those states will be the recipients of those grants? What do members opposite think is the proportion of small businesses in each of those states that have received said grants? I know the answer.

It is true that New South Wales has a \$10 000 grants scheme, and it is possibly true that some travel agents have received it, but of all the small businesses in New South Wales, only 9.5 per cent have received the grant. In Queensland — Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I might also say that if people want to go to a restaurant in New South Wales, they had better hope it is a really big one, because they have the four-square-metre rule in place. The vast majority of hospitality outlets in New South Wales are not open or are not making money, because they have the four-square-metre rule in place. Ask New South Wales how its casino is going. Ask New South Wales how many people are gathering in crowds. New South Wales has a far more restricted economy than Western Australia, so the fact that only 9.5 per cent of its small businesses—most in the hospital sector are not making any money—are in receipt of that grant is an important point.

Queensland's economy is far more reliant on tourism than our own. A big proportion of the employment in Queensland relates to hospitality and tourism and it shut the border to its two biggest markets. A Queensland small business, restaurant, cafe or pub owner is hoping a lot of Queenslanders are feeling really hungry because they do not have their markets. However, only 8.8 per cent of Queensland businesses have received this fund. We have an open economy. We have a \$5.5 billion recovery plan. Everyone in Western Australia is going to benefit from that. Queensland and New South Wales do not have a recovery plan. South Australia, where customers have to sit down to have a beer, has reimposed restrictions because it has a community transmission problem. South Australia has the highest proportion of small businesses, but only 12.8 per cent have received this grant. The vast majority of small businesses in every other jurisdiction did not get this grant scheme, yet they are suffering under far more trying circumstances than businesses in Western Australia.

There is confusion amongst the opposition. The Liberal Party opposition is locked up in a dark room and believes that everything is dire and disastrous, and the Nationals WA opposition is screaming at us to get people out to the regions because the regional businesses are doing so well and are experiencing a boom and are exhausted. That part of the claim is pretty accurate; people are doing it tough, because every single region, with the exception of East Kimberley, is going off. More people are travelling and it is not the usual Western Australian travel with limited spend, despite some of the claims made by people who claim to know about tourism. Tourism has not just been during the school holidays. No-one can get a booking in Kalbarri right now. Geraldton is packed. Good luck trying to go to Broome in the next couple of months. We heard from the local member of Exmouth, who is complaining that it is going so well.

As the Premier already announced, there will be a campaign and a system to entice Western Australians who live in the metropolitan area or in some of the regions where there may not be high employment to go out to those places to support them, particularly in agriculture and hospitality. Calling for something that we have already announced that we are going to do is a great move. But it is not in any way support for the argument that we have not done anything that somehow it is not working. The Wander Out Yonder campaign is an absolute success. It is driving Western Australians into the regions like never before. People who would normally take a cruise on the Rhine or fly to America for a month, or go skiing in Japan, are going out to our regions and are doing things they have not done before. When I was in the regions, people talked to me about that. I talked to the small businesses in Geraldton, and small businesses in retail are benefiting like never before from Western Australians travelling out there; it is not just the locals.

There is evidence that retail in Western Australia is leading the nation. Jobs growth in WA has led the nation in the last month. It is laughable that members of the opposition still make reference to the unemployment rate when they know full well that we have the highest participation rate in the nation. Obviously, that skews the data. If we care about actual jobs and whether people are benefiting, we will look at the number of jobs created and we will see that Western Australia is doing a wonderful job. Of all the mainland states, we had the strongest jobs growth in July. Employment has increased by around 19 000, recovering 41 300 of the jobs that were initially lost since the onset of COVID. These are good-news stories. These are good things. Opposition members should not talk down small business in Western Australia.

We are benefiting from good, strong leadership, great governance, wonderful public servants and the contribution of Western Australians across the board in the form of having the best, most open economy in the nation, thanks to our hard borders and thanks to the Premier refusing to listen to the Leader of the Opposition and the entire Liberal Party and thanks to the leadership the Premier has provided. It is extraordinary that the Liberal Party would even come in here and have the gall to suggest anything in regard to policy.

I will conclude because I think it is important that other members of the government are given the opportunity to speak, noting that we have had two hours of opposition falsehoods peddled in this place.

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister. Thank you, everyone.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I note that the opposition members are incapable of agreeing on what the problem is before they stand up in this place. The WA Liberals are still locked in the closet and think everything is terrible, but the Nationals WA think it is going so well and we are not building enough houses for all the extra workers that we need to get into the regions to support the boom time. It is a challenging environment, but, ultimately, the pandemic caused the problems for the travel agents and the challenges for the businesses, and it is still causing challenges, particularly for our big city hotels. We are working on something for them and for east Kununurra. We have done stuff for them and we are doing more. All the businesses across the state have confronted a challenge. Neither the federal government, with its unlimited capacity, nor the state government, with its much lower capacity, will be able to replace that period of loss—in the south, it was a period of only two months—by government grants, and nor should they.

The best thing that we can do for Western Australians, taxpayers and small business people is to ensure that our economy is open and vibrant and that there is plenty of opportunity for all people so that they can do what they are doing well at the moment in a lot of locations across the state far better than any other jurisdiction. People do what they do best: run a good, solid business; meet the demands of their clientele; and, in this case, build a future market. If their normal revenue stream, which might be generated by interstate or overseas travel and is now replaced with interstate travel, can be retained when we open the borders, they will have even more opportunity. It will mean people will have greater markets and greater diversity and they will be more robust and resilient into the future.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): Member for Churchlands. You were quick, member for Victoria Park, but you were not quick enough!

MR S.K. L'ESTRANGE (Churchlands) [6.28 pm]: Mr Acting Speaker, I think it is fantastic that you kept your word, saying you were going to rotate speakers when you were in the chair.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! I will take speakers from either side as we go. I am not favouring anyone, but thank you for the compliments from both sides.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I think it is important that the opposition gets an opportunity to rebut some of the comments made by the Minister for Small Business, particularly given that during his contribution, he failed to address a key point brought to this chamber by the member for Darling Range. What extra support will be given to these small business owner-operators who have missed out under the government's efforts to support the small business sector? That is the whole point of the member for Darling Range's motion today.

The member for Darling Range presented to the Minister for Small Business examples of ministers in different states around this country who are doing more than he is doing to support those small businesses that have not been captured by the support currently given by the state government. That was the whole point of the member for Darling Range's presentation today.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: She presented examples of how different states around this country are doing more than this government and how small businesses in this state are missing out because they are not caught up by the support currently being given by this state government. That was the premise of her whole contribution. I know that the Minister for Tourism tried to hold members on this side to account for their honesty in this chamber, which I think is a bit unfair. I was not in the chamber at that time—so correct me if I am wrong—but I was told that the minister said that the member for Darling Range had never met Christine Ross-Davies, who goes by the name of Christine Ross.

Mr P. Papalia: She talks as if she never met her.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Apparently the minister did not say that. The minister needs to look at the member for Darling Range's Facebook page. There is a video on that Facebook page in which the member for Darling Range is standing with Ms Christine Ross-Davies. There is also a video on my Facebook page that was taken at a small business in my electorate. It shows the shadow Minister for Small Business and a number of owner-operator tourism businesses from my electorate, her electorate and surrounding areas who are all very, very concerned about how the McGowan Labor government is handling the current situation.

Yes, we are in a pandemic and, yes, we are in very difficult times, but thank goodness for the member for Darling Range bringing a motion like this to the chamber today. Let us not forget that the member for Darling Range is Ms 9.3 per cent. I know government members do not want to hear it. I know they thought that they had it locked in. They thought it was a lay-down misère that Labor would win the Darling Range by-election, brought about due to the unfortunate circumstances of the sitting member. Nonetheless, there was a lot of hubris at the time. The government had been

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

hitting people with very, very difficult cost-of-living increases, ignoring the needs of the suburban people of the Darling Range electorate and small business owner-operators out there. Lo and behold, the current member for Darling Range got out, doorknocked, did the hard work and got to know the key issues and won with a landslide swing of 9.3 per cent. When she comes into this chamber and says to the government, “You guys need to listen to these small business owner-operators”, she is representing their interests. She is out there on the ground and is listening to them. She does not sit behind a desk waiting for ministerial advisers to tell her the latest data. She actually sits down with people, listens to their concerns, understands the challenges that they are facing, looks for solutions that she sees other states utilising to help businesspeople and comes into this chamber and says, “Why don’t you do the same? Tell us why you can’t?” If the Treasurer gets an opportunity to stand up today, maybe he can tell us: Is the impact on the budget too great? If it is not, why not do it? If it is, tell us why it is too great? Tell us what else the government will do to support people in this situation? Tell us why the government cannot do what the member for Darling Range has said these other states are doing? We want to hear the reasons why the government cannot do these things. We do not want to hear the rhetoric of data and statistics that suits the government’s argument. We want the government to address what the member for Darling Range has brought to the chamber today.

I, too, agree with many of my parliamentary colleagues on this side of the chamber that the McGowan Labor government has done a good job with the hard border. For those who decide to follow my Twitter feed, I was a very strong advocate on the stance of a very hard border closure. I never changed my position on that. There was a reason for that.

Ms R. Saffioti: You disagreed with your leader?

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: I stuck to my views on it from the start, minister.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: Our leader actually agrees with hard borders.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: Our leader has said publicly that she agrees with hard borders.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: We have two points of entry across —

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: Can I just move on?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: I am in the same paragraph, but if I could move to the next sentence, it would be much appreciated, minister.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: I am still on the same paragraph; let me finish it.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: Let me finish it. We know that we have two land borders through which people enter this state: across the Nullarbor or up through the Kimberley. The rest is by sea or by air. We know that while those borders were secure —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: This gets to the minister’s point on why —

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L’ESTRANGE: I am finding it very difficult.

Point of Order

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 19 August 2020]

p5256b-5284a

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

Mrs A.K. HAYDEN: When the Acting Speaker makes a call, I think members are meant to come to order, and listen to and obey the Acting Speaker. I believe Mr Acting Speaker is being disrespected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): Thank you. The point of order is not upheld but, member and ministers —
Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member! Minister! I am on my feet. Minister for Transport, I call you to order for the first time. Ministers, please allow the member to continue his remarks. Minister for Small Business, I do believe the member for Churchlands when he said that he was not interjecting on you. Thank you.

Debate Resumed

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The Minister for Transport, with all of her prowess, having run many, many small businesses, may well be able to educate members on this side of the chamber on how to run a small business.

Ms R. Saffioti: I actually lived in one.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister might have lived in one, but has she actually set up one on her own—laid out her own capital and had a crack?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Ministers!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Has the minister actually run her own balance sheet on a business? I do not think that she has. If I can continue with the paragraph I began some time ago —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, please allow the member to continue his remarks. I assume, member for Churchlands, that you are not seeking to take interjections?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am trying to get this paragraph out of the way.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I assume you are not taking interjections! Thank you, ministers.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: It is probably only three sentences, but I am only on sentence one. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I will continue.

Because the government closed those borders, it obviously meant that once we got to the phase that allowed people to go out and travel intrastate, the businesses within Western Australia that could take Western Australian tourists could flourish. Of course, no-one disagrees with that. That is a great outcome.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: That is sentence two; can I get to sentence three?

Mr P. Papalia: She said they were all shutting.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Listen to me; obviously, some businesses are doing it tough —

Mr P. Papalia: You've got no idea.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: So now I have no idea. Maybe if the minister would let me speak, he would understand what I am getting to.

We have a situation in which there will be business groups that cannot be sustained. We are asking the Minister for Small Business —

Mr P. Papalia: Which ones?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The ones that are not succeeding right now.

Mr P. Papalia: Say which ones.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The shadow Minister for Small Business has already outlined them.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mrs Alyssa Hayden; Mr Vincent Catania; Deputy Speaker; Mr Dean Nalder; Mr Kyran O'Donnell; Ms Libby Mettam; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Acting Speaker

The ACTING SPEAKER: Sorry, member. Minister for Small Business, I am on my feet; I call you to order for the first time. I will ask the member for Churchlands to talk through the Chair. Minister for Small Business, I know questions are being asked, but the member is not seeking interjections.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. Clearly, there are small businesses that are not succeeding in current times and need support. That is why the member for Darling Range has brought this motion before us. As Western Australians have got used to the fact that they are living in a much safer environment than Victoria, for example—we congratulate the government on its hard stance on the borders and we have supported that—we are starting to notice that people are getting somewhat confused with the government's stance, because it is starting to make decisions on who can and cannot cross the border.

Mr P. Papalia: Do you want the borders down?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am not saying that at all. I am not saying that; I am talking about how the government is managing the people that it has allowed into this state. There is a difference. Some people are coming into the state without being tested, but others are being forced into quarantine. The member for Hillarys was telling me about a married couple in his constituency who could not get back to Perth. They finally got permission to come back to Perth but one was on a flight the day before the other. The person who arrived first was allowed to go straight home. The other partner arrived the next day and had to go into quarantine, which they had to pay for. These inconsistencies in how the government is treating Western Australians during the COVID pandemic is confusing people.

It is like the government's decision on the Perth Royal Show. I am not saying that it is good, bad or otherwise. All I am saying is that on the one hand the government is advocating for the Grand Final to be held at Optus Stadium, but on the other hand it is cancelling the Royal Show. On one hand, the government is saying that we need to be social distancing while at the footy, while on the other hand, it is saying we do not need to while we are on public transport. These types of messages are starting to make people think: what is going on? We do not have community spread, so they just want some clarity. Beyond looking for clarity on how the government is managing the health situation, people are now also asking: what is the economic plan for recovery in Western Australia? People are genuinely concerned about that. What is the government's plan? The minister will recall that I have talked about planning methodology and end-state planning. The Minister for Tourism knows all about end-state planning.

Mr P. Papalia: The recovery plan.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The government has its recovery plan phases, but what is the government's end state plan? What are the government's objectives for achieving jobs growth in the various sectors linked to that end-state plan? We are not seeing that.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Listen and you will find out.

The way small business succeeds in this state is through a vibrant economy. If a vibrant economy is not operating, small businesses do not succeed. The government needs to generate more income in the economy of Western Australia and it needs to have a plan for that. It does not. I will tell members why the government does not have a plan. If we look at the latest CommSec "State of the States" report, dated July 2020 —

Mr P. Papalia: That's the WA Recovery Plan, right there.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I turn to the CommSec report. Members will notice in the CommSec report that we are doing well in economic growth and equipment investment. We are ranked second in Australia. Why? The government knows why. We are completely reliant on that bit of data because of the performance of the mining sector. The mining sector is propping up the data that the government is using in this chamber to say that it is succeeding as a government. It is ignoring the data that demonstrates which sectors of the Western Australian economy are genuinely hurting. One of those sectors, the key sector that the member for Darling Range spoke about today, is the small business sector. That is why she asked: What is the government's plan for more support to match the support being offered by other states? What is the government's reason for not doing it? Tell us the reason. Give us the rationale. Do not just tell us that it has good statistics and equipment investment brought about by the mining sector.

Let us not forget that the iron ore price is booming right now. It is great for the Western Australian budget. We know that. The Treasurer knows that. We also know that the Chinese buyers are very keen to make sure they are getting a lot of iron ore from Western Australia at the moment. We understand that this state is supplying that iron ore through companies such as Fortescue Metals Group and BHP because after its tailings dam failure, the Vale mine

in Brazil currently cannot get ore to the market. We are a key supplier. This increased demand for our iron ore and lithium, as the minister knows, is driving investment and economic growth in that sector, which is propping up not only this state but, more broadly, the national books. I know the government knows that because it was in its 2019–20 budget. From memory, it might have been on page 9 of budget paper No 3. It outlined exactly the projected economic growth figures in its own budget paper, off the back of the success of the mining sector. Even then, I know that the Treasurer would not have envisaged the volume of success that flowed from the mining sector. The unfortunate counter to that success has been COVID-19. These other sectors have gone backwards while the mining sector has managed to go forwards. We have seen that success in strong gold and iron ore prices and with the investment in lithium et cetera. That sector is going well. That is the only thing that is propping up the statistics and books for the performance of the Western Australian economy.

If we think about the performance of this economy in the context of COVID-19, we should do so whilst comparing it with the performance of the other states. In that regard, we are doing very poorly because we know that the unemployment rate, for example, is 63 per cent higher than the on-decade average, ranking us eighth or last out of all the states and territories in Australia. That is even up against a state such as Victoria, with its dramas. Why is the minister saying on the one hand that we are operating more successfully than any other state in managing COVID and therefore we have more economic activity that can drive the domestic economy in Western Australia while, on the other hand, we are ranked eighth? Why is it that we are not second or even first? What did the government do in the three and a half years leading up to now to shore up the Western Australian economy so that it can be prepared and ready for shocks like this? I do not think the government has a plan. It is completely reliant on the success of others to prop up its statistics and help its media releases. I have not seen anything.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia poached the Treasurer's key adviser to become one of its senior economists. After the adviser was poached from the Treasurer's office, the Treasurer said, "He was an outstanding senior adviser of mine and I wish him well in his new job at the CCI." He had fewer troubles than some of the Treasurer's other advisers. Lo and behold, within 24 hours of the Treasurer saying how outstanding that senior adviser was, that senior adviser said that the Western Australian economy—this is pre-COVID-19—was in dire straits. There you go. We cannot get a more damning indictment of the performance of the Western Australian government than when a former senior adviser to the Treasurer says, after taking on a new job, that the position he just left was not doing a good enough job to support the people of Western Australia and grow the economy.

The government gets a tick for COVID-19. It has managed to flatten the curve and it has stopped community spread by maintaining the hard borders. We give the government a tick for that—there is no argument here—but it should not allow that to be its smokescreen for its economic mismanagement, which was the case until March this year. The government was asleep at the wheel of the economy of Western Australia. It was only succeeding off the back of the mining sector with China's demand for iron ore and the Vale situation in Rio, Brazil.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Getting back to the Treasurer's former senior adviser, the CCI's biannual analysis shows that population growth will slow to its lowest levels since 1916, which presents a very real challenge. Before COVID-19, the government turned foreign students away from the state in droves due to its incompetent management of the international student sector and the way it managed overseas investment in the Western Australian apartment sector. Those things combined have meant that we have lost a huge amount of the market share of that group of international students, who could have become future residents and citizens of Western Australia, which would have been some effort to curb the population growth disaster that lies ahead when we will see the lowest population growth levels since 1916.

The CCI said that the domestic economy is forecast to contract by 1.9 per cent. It highlights the fact that the overall economy will shrink by only 0.2 per cent. Why? As I said earlier, it is because it has been completely propped up by the success of the mining sector. The CCI states that the main drags on the economy in 2020–21 will be significant falls in consumption and business investment, which is the point of the member for Darling Range's motion. Her point is that if the government does not support domestic economy businesses that do not rely on global commodity markets and global demand—local businesses—that will be a big drag on the economy. The CCI said that if business investment increased by just one percentage point over the next three years, the Western Australian economy would be around \$1.5 billion larger.

Mr P. Papalia: How many small businesses should get \$10 000?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister can tell me.

Mr P. Papalia: No, I'm asking you.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister should tell me.

Mr P. Papalia: It's your policy. It's not my policy.

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Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: No, the minister should tell me. He knows what I have said from the start.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Let me repeat it for the minister.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): Member! Minister! Minister, the member for Churchlands is not seeking to take interjections. Member for Churchlands, you said that you did not seek to take interjections. Please talk to the Chair.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Mr Acting Speaker, from the outset I have sought to address the member for Darling Range's motion, which is to prove why the government cannot match other states in what they are doing for small business.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I have even pointed out to the Treasurer in my contribution today that if he cannot match —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: — what the member for Darling Range is putting forward, he should tell us why. Did I not say that, members?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Ministers!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I will tell the ministers why I put that question.

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I can read. The minister can read; she should read it out herself.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Ministers!

Ms R. Saffioti: You do not know what she is putting forward.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Give me the piece of paper. I read it earlier. I am not going to quote it.

Ms R. Saffioti: How do you know what she is putting forward?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: She is putting forward —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo, member for West Swan —

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The government has its big heavy hitters coming through now!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, I am on my feet. There are several calls: member for Wanneroo, member for Warnbro, member for West Swan, member for Churchlands and member for Carine, I am calling each of you to order for talking when I am standing. Member, again, you have indicated that you do not seek to take interjections. Can you speak to the Chair so you can finish your remarks.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia goes on.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The minister should listen to my contribution and she will find out.

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia goes on to say that in 2021 household consumption is forecast to fall by three per cent.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: This badgering —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, members.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Household consumption is forecast to fall by three per cent, business investment by 4.5 per cent and imports by five per cent, and unemployment is forecast to reach 11 per cent. Those statistics are the ones that matter to the people of Western Australia. The Prime Minister of Australia is doing a fantastic job over there in Canberra, and we already hear people talking up the prospects of a vaccine. We are already hearing

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globally that on the near horizon there is the prospect of a vaccine. What the people of Western Australia will start turning to very, very quickly is an economic narrative for an economic recovery. That is what they will be focused on right now. I have here what the member for Darling Range is saying. This is her motion. We are here to listen and to debate it, because do members opposite know how debate works? Arguments are presented —

Mr D.A. Templeman: You yell and we do not listen!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I tell members what, when the Minister for Local Government says, “You yell and we do not listen”, do members know what he does? He does not listen to towns such as the Town of Cambridge.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: He goes out there and threatens and bullies.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, if you could keep to the context of the motion.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The member for Darling Range moved a motion. She said —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor government to stop neglecting our hardworking Western Australian small and family-run businesses by immediately providing a COVID-19 assistance grant to COVID-19 affected small businesses of up to \$10 000, like all other governments have done across Australia, because behind every small business is a family.

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Acting Speaker, can I continue?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, thank you!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The point of her motion is for the government to prove it cannot be done.

Ms R. Saffioti: What is your policy?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am debating this motion, minister. What is the minister's point badgering me about whether I have a policy or not? Can I debate the motion or not?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! I seek to give you all of the protection that I can, but if you could please not respond to interjections when you have advised that you would not like to take interjections.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I appreciate your protection, Acting Speaker.

The member for Darling Range has moved her motion to be debated. The whole point of a debate is to tell us why something cannot be done. Have you done that yet? No. You have not told us.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, through the Chair.

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Mr Acting Speaker —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am on my feet. Member, please talk to the Chair.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. The whole point of this motion is to address what the member for Darling Range has put forward. That is the point of private members' business. That is the point of debate. If government members want to turn this into some cheap political pointscoring to try to draw in the shadow Minister for Defence Issues; Racing and Gaming; Corrective Services; and Emergency Services so that he can roll off his tongue some small business policy here and now, they are not going to get it, because that, ministers, is not the point of this debate! The point of this debate is to address the motion of the member for Darling Range. So far, government members have not come up with one rational reason why they cannot address what she has put in this motion. They have simply not put it.

Ms R. Saffioti: What's your policy?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Read it; it is a motion. It is not a policy; it is a motion.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, thank you.

Ms S.E. Winton: You've got 200 days to come up with a policy. You've got to get to work!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

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Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am really glad that we have the member for Wanneroo giving us advice on how to be an opposition!

Dwelling commencements are down 37.4 per cent. We are ranked seventh. As I said, our unemployment rate puts us last. We are really struggling with population growth. Our housing finance commitments are down 33.5 per cent. We are ranked seventh across the board in all of the key economic indicator areas, according to CommSec, and that is why our state is not succeeding in managing two things. We have given the government a tick for COVID-19 and the health aspect. We have said, "Well done." I have said that several times—tick; well done.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I have not contradicted anybody, minister.

Ms R. Saffioti: I went through your social media and there is not one picture of your leader.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I have not contradicted anybody.

Ms R. Saffioti: I went through your social media. There is not one picture of your leader.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I have not seen any likes. Give me a few likes on some of my posts!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, thank you.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, members! Thank you!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Member, please continue.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr W.J. Johnston: So why don't you put photos of Liza on any of your social media?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, thank you very much!

Mr W.J. Johnston: So tell me, why don't you do it?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cannington, it is lovely that you have joined us, but please allow the member to continue his remarks. He is not seeking to take interjections.

Ms R. Saffioti: I have been through a year of posts.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: A year! I think I have been posting for longer than a year.

Mr W.J. Johnston: But for over 12 months you haven't put your leader in your social media.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am amazed at how much interest they take in my social media!

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: The Acting Speaker will notice —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, do you seek to take interjections?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: No, I am just waiting.

The ACTING SPEAKER: If you could refuse or decline the dialogue, that would assist me.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I am trying to.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Please continue your remarks, member for Churchlands.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I am just fascinated that they are interested in my social media posts. They are either community-based posts or they are shadow portfolio posts. They are one or the other. They are perfectly normal.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr W.J. Johnston: Who is doing your costings for your policies?

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Who is doing my costings?

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Mr W.J. Johnston: Yes, of your policies.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: For my policies or for our policies?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, you cannot see me because you are looking towards government members.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I keep getting drawn in! They are like a black hole—they just suck you in!

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Churchlands, I am on my feet. Please do not engage in a dialogue. If you speak to the Chair, you can see whether I am on my feet. Please continue your remarks.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker.

Mr W.J. Johnston interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cannington!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Minister for Mines and Petroleum, we have our leadership team. We have an election committee. We have a shadow Treasurer. We have a leader. They get together. We submit our policies to them. We have all done it; we all submit our policies. They are then costed and given a hierarchy. There is a process. It is being followed. I do not know why the minister is asking me about this.

Mr W.J. Johnston: It's probably because I just want to know who's doing your costings.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I have just told the minister who is doing the costings.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members!

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: I have told members who is doing the costing.

Several members interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: My God! Look at them all! It is like a gaggle or something.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! We need to move on.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Yes, good point, Mr Acting Speaker. We need to wrap up. It has been a very exciting afternoon.

The ACTING SPEAKER: You do not need to wrap up. I am just indicating that you have about 30 seconds.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: In conclusion, whilst dealing with an atrocious display over there, I make the point that the member for Darling Range put forward a perfectly reasonable motion to be debated. She was looking for answers in support of her community.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.