

CORONAVIRUS — ECONOMIC RECOVERY

697. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Treasurer:

I refer to Western Australia's nation-leading response to COVID-19 that has allowed for the most open economy in the country and delivered the strongest jobs growth in any state.

- (1) Will the Treasurer outline to the house whether there are any more encouraging signs in today's Australian Bureau of Statistics jobs figures that Western Australians should feel positive about?
- (2) Will the Treasurer outline to the house how the confidence in the Western Australian economy compares with that in other states?

Mr B.S. WYATT replied:

I thank the member for Belmont for that very good question.

- (1)–(2) What we are seeing now—the Premier talked about this in his answer a minute ago—is that the efforts the state government has gone to in Western Australia to ensure that the health response is strong and firm is delivering economic outcomes that we want to see for Western Australians. The government announced not that long ago its \$5.5 billion recovery plan. That is now starting to gather momentum, but behind our hard border we are living a life as close to normal as anyone else on the planet because we have had no community spread of the coronavirus for nearly 160 days. The August figures show that not only did we create over 32 000 jobs—the largest increase in jobs on record—but also we are seeing the largest drop in the unemployment rate on record, from 8.3 per cent to seven per cent, at a time when the participation rate is still surging. Western Australians are coming back into the labour force because they have the confidence and they see their opportunities there for employment. It is important that we as a community keep people connected to jobs. That is why we are pleased to see so many Western Australians coming back into the workforce.

Hours worked is another measure that we have kept a close eye on. Again, it is another strong increase—a 3.8 per cent increase in hours worked. That means that from the moment we saw the large decline and we imposed the restrictions on the economy to fight the virus, 90 per cent of those hours lost are back—90 per cent. That is an extraordinary outcome on the back of a surging participation rate. Indeed, if we had the average participation rate of all the states, as I have shown before, our unemployment rate would be at six per cent, not seven per cent.

There are all sorts of datasets. Job advertisements, a leading indicator of employment, are now above the levels recorded in mid-March, and trending higher. ABS payroll jobs data suggests that more improvement is coming. Importantly, youth unemployment is on its way down—down to 13.6 per cent in August, which is still too high, but we have to remember that it was 18 per cent under the former Liberal–National government, so it has come down a long way.

The ANZ data that the Premier talked about yesterday highlighted the fact that consumer spending in WA is the highest in the nation. Indeed, some data we received today or maybe late yesterday from Bankwest merchant tracking is showing that several sectors have now exceeded pre-COVID-19 turnover after experiencing very large increases—campgrounds are up 31 per cent; pubs, taverns and inns are up 31 per cent; and hotels, motels and resorts are up 29 per cent. We see the spend coming through as the commonwealth and state policies around economic stimulus work.

If we want to be anywhere, it is Western Australia. The figures show that the hard border, the discipline of Western Australians and the efforts around the work that we have done as a government to support our economy are working, but the job is not done. Seven per cent is still too high. We will continue to focus our efforts on getting Western Australians back into work.

If I can think of one thing that will bring our confidence at the household and business level back to stratospheric levels, it would be the Perth Demons knocking off West Perth this Sunday. After 23 years, it has been a long time between drinks for the Redlegs and if they can pull that off, I know that every single Western Australian would be delighted!

The SPEAKER: I just rule the last bit out of order!