

SKILLED MIGRATION

176. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:

I refer to one of the Premier's first decisions as Premier to slash the skilled migration list and remove Perth as a region for the regional sponsored migration scheme, and his subsequent boast at the time —

No longer can overseas workers be fast-tracked into bricklaying, tiling or electrician jobs.

Given the impact of this decision, which saw skilled migration fall by 51 per cent in the first three years of his government —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please, members!

Ms L. METTAM: Shall I start again?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I am guessing that most of you do not want to hear the question from the start again, but that is where we will end up having to go. It seems that everyone else is very keen to answer the question; it is a question to the Premier. Member, you can start from the beginning, you can start halfway through—wherever you think is relevant.

Ms L. METTAM: I will start from the quote —

No longer can overseas workers be fast-tracked into bricklaying, tiling or electrician jobs.

Given the impact of this decision, which saw skilled migration fall by 51 per cent in the first three years of his government, does the Premier still believe this was the correct policy given the massive skills shortages we are now experiencing across the state?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I am very pleased to answer that question. We can understand that it is now 2023. Back in March 2017, when this government took office, we inherited an economy that was in recession. It was actually in recession. We had an unemployment rate of 6.4 per cent. I cannot remember the exact numbers, but the best part of 200 000 or so Western Australians were out of work. That was the situation we inherited from the former government. We had a set of finances in which debt was climbing to \$44 billion across the forward estimates. The former government inherited debt at \$3.6 billion when it arrived in office. We had a situation in which particular tradespeople, and a whole range of occupations, did not have enough work. There were not enough jobs out there for Western Australians. That was the situation that we inherited when we arrived in office.

That is one of the reasons the former government lost office, because the Liberal Party cannot manage finances and cannot manage an economy these days. That is now beyond the Liberal Party. Every time we do something to promote economic activity, it opposes it. That is now the reality of the modern Liberal Party. The modern Liberal Party is just a group of people who oppose what Labor does. That is all they do. That is all they are now. There is nothing else to them—just oppose what Labor does. It is a strange philosophy to just oppose whatever someone else does. As I said yesterday, Hon Peter Collier is now taking the side of rioting people who assault people, and because they are against the government, he is on their side. That is the way the Liberal Party acts. It is in cahoots with the Nationals WA that basically has no respect for public finances and basically hates the Liberal Party, in my experience, and the Liberal Party hates the National Party. They actually hate each other more than they hate us, but for some reason they are in an alliance with each other! It is an unusual phenomenon.

I must say, I have talked to other Premiers and other leaders of political parties in the eastern states who are of your persuasion and they confirm that. It is a very unusual thing how the whole model of conservative politics works these days. That was the situation we inherited. What did we do? We took action. Then what happened? Job creation happened and we started reducing the unemployment rate and our public finances improved. Then COVID came along, obviously, which was two and a half or the best part of three years of the most unusual economic circumstances I think the world has seen since the Great Depression, really. We had to manage that. What did we do along the way? We amended the initial policy we took because circumstances changed. What did John Maynard Keynes say? It was words to the effect of, "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?"