

SMALL BUSINESS — GOVERNMENT REFORMS

**547. Mr S.A. MILLMAN to the Minister for Small Business:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's support for small business, which has already seen greater flexibility for WA's hospitality industry through reforms to liquor laws. Can the minister update the house on the action this government is taking to further support small business, drive our local economy and create more local jobs?

**Mr P. PAPALIA replied:**

I thank the member for Mount Lawley for his robust advocacy on behalf of small business not only in his electorate, but also right across the state. The government is very proud to be acting on behalf of small businesses and assisting them after the neglect they suffered for eight and a half years under the Barnett government. We passed the Western Australian Jobs Bill in 2017, immediately after taking office. That action that was intended to provide —

**Mr A. Krsticevic** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Carine, please!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** That action was intended to provide opportunity for local small businesses to win government contracts, from which they had been previously excluded. I have witnessed this in action. I have seen builders in Pinjarra get a job that they would have been excluded from in the past, primarily because they were local providers and they were elevated up the chain of decision-making on the project at the Pinjarra Paceway.

I am very proud to say that like so many other members in this place, I was appalled by the treatment of subcontractors, particularly in 2014 when the federal government was throwing billions of dollars at the state Liberal-National government for Building the Education Revolution. Thousands of subcontractors were left without payment by primes. Many of the suppliers of those subcontractors were left without payment. Marriages broke up, homes were lost and sold and, tragically, some people took their lives. The only response they got at the time was, "It's a commercial matter."

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Riverton.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member for Riverton interjects.

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Riverton, I call you to order for the first time.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member for Riverton is the individual who confronted the subcontractors who were begging for assistance —

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Riverton, I call you to order for a second time.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member for Riverton effectively said, "It's an issue between the primes and the subcontractors; government cannot play a part. It's your problem, effectively." He washed his hands of it. We did not think that was right, particularly with government-controlled contracts and taxpayers were paying the bills. I am very proud to say that we have introduced into Parliament an amendment to the Small Business Development Corporation Act to empower the Small Business Commissioner to investigate matters.

**Dr M.D. Nahan** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** This is something that the member for Riverton was incapable of conceiving of. When this bill passes—rapidly, I hope—the commissioner will be able to employ the subcontractor support unit within the Small Business Development Corporation that we have created, funded and resourced. It will be able to receive notifications of poor behaviour by prime contractors and investigate. It will be able to compel provision of evidence. That will be a significant change. I believe it will change the culture of the construction industry in Western Australia for the better. That is something that the member for Riverton and the previous government were incapable of contemplating. They could not conceive of it, because it has not been done anywhere else in the country. It is a first for the nation, and I am very proud to say that we are doing it.

As the member for Mount Lawley indicated, we have also amended the Liquor Act to assist numerous hospitality outlets across the state. I can report that since we took office, the number of liquor licences for small bars in this state—which exist only thanks to the Premier in his previous incarnation in the last Labor government—has increased from 112 when we took office to 129 currently. The number of tavern licences has increased from 410 to 424, and restaurant licences have increased over the same period from 1 056 to 1 087. That is because we have

amended the act to make it easier to encourage investment and to encourage small businesses to take the risk and get into the game, and they are taking on that challenge.

I am also happy to report that in October 2018, the Western Australian government worked with the federal government to make up to \$126 million available to create thousands of apprenticeships and traineeships after signing up to the federal government's Skilling Australians Fund national partnership. Key to that is an employer incentive scheme that will be implemented on 1 July; the member will be happy to know that that will be coming into play on 1 July. It will provide training support to employers, including small businesses. The employer incentive scheme will extend training support to around 6 000 businesses in Western Australia. That is a wonderful initiative.

There have been plenty of other initiatives. The Small Business Development Corporation, in direct response to the member for Scarborough's neglect of her small businesses during the development of the Scarborough beachfront precinct and her government's poor treatment of small businesses at that time, has developed the small business friendly initiative. Some 56 per cent of all small businesses in Western Australia are now covered by the small business friendly initiative, making it safer and better for small businesses, defending their interests, promoting their interests and giving them some support —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members, please. I cannot hear this riveting answer. I am sure it is going to end very quickly!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** The member must have gone to sleep during the Minister for Local Government's presentation.

Several members interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** You obviously were not timing the Minister for Culture and the Arts!

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Members!

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** For the first time in almost a decade, small businesses in Western Australia have a government that is supportive of them. They appreciate it, and the number of small businesses is growing. The confidence of the small business sector is improving, and it is all down to the interest and support demonstrated by the state government.