

BUSINESS CONFIDENCE

757. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Treasurer:

I start by acknowledging the presence in the public gallery of teacher aides and cleaners from Jandakot and all over Perth today.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! I ask the member for Jandakot to take his seat. Acknowledging people in the gallery is an important part of this place, member for Jandakot, and I know that it is done with the best of intentions. Other members of this place should also acknowledge that.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question is directed —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie-Preston!

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: My question is directed to the Treasurer. As today marks the anniversary of the swearing-in of the Liberal-National government, can the Treasurer advise the house of how the state's small and medium business sectors —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Jandakot to take his seat. Member for Collie-Preston, I ask you to stop interjecting and I formally call you to order for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I ask the Treasurer on this anniversary whether he will advise the house on how the state's small and medium business sectors have responded to the government's policy agenda.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:

Mr Speaker —

Mr R.H. Cook: A probing question.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: A very good question.

Mr C.J. Barnett: A tough one.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is a tough one, Premier, and as I rise after a year in government, I am struggling to come up with an answer. However, I will give it my best shot.

What have we had today? We have had the Commonwealth Bank-Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia survey of 500 businesses in Western Australia that has come out with some good news. It has come out with the news that the expectations of businesses in WA of the year ahead are at the highest they have been since June 2007. Half of respondents to the Commonwealth Bank-Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey believe that the Western Australian economy will strengthen in the year ahead. That is good news.

Mr E.S. Ripper: After unemployment has doubled, of course it's good news!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I might talk about the Leader of the Opposition in a minute.

Mr E.S. Ripper: I welcome that.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: We have had other good news, because the Leader of the Opposition cannot have his yellowcake and eat it! That is the basic issue.

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is the basic issue: the Leader of the Opposition cannot have his yellowcake and eat it in this place!

There has been other good news. Recently, the unemployment rate in August fell from 5.7 per cent to 5.4 per cent. The Leader of the Opposition might be interested to know that, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics information, in August more than 12 000 Western Australians found full-time jobs. That is good news.

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: In the June quarter the state enjoyed economic growth, as measured by gross state product, of 1.6 per cent. That is good news. That economic growth was by and large driven by investment.

Mr E.S. Ripper interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It is a good thing to see investment re-igniting in Western Australia. There is good news in confidence, jobs and economic activity, but there is a lot more hard work to be done by the government for business in this state to turn that potential into on-the-ground economic activity. That is why this government has a plan. We have a plan based around reforming the approvals process, cutting red tape, a state infrastructure strategy that will see billions of dollars invested to protect jobs and putting in place the sorts of state-building infrastructure projects, such as Oakajee and the Kimberley gas precinct, that will drive the long-term economic development of this state. What do we have from the Leader of the Opposition? A public policy dinosaur! The opposition is like one of those old woolly mammoths in the Siberian tundra that has never defrosted and has lumbered down —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: It has lumbered into the Western Australian public policy debate. What has the opposition's contribution been? What has its defrosted woolly mammoth of public policy been? It has been —

Several members interjected.

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: Do members opposite want to form a committee? Employment is under challenge but the opposition wants to form a committee. We want to reform retail trading hours and pull this state into the twenty-first century; the opposition sticks its head in the sand. Heaven forbid we want to mine uranium in Western Australia and export it. What is the public policy message that members opposite and those bookends of public policy, Hon Sally Talbot and Hon Jon Ford—those doyennes of the left—send to potential investors in Western Australia? It is: don't come here!

Mr C.J. Tallentire: You're too gutless to debate nuclear waste!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: I am not gutless to talk about that! We went to the election on uranium mining, my friend, and we are on this side of the chamber and the member is over there. There is a comparison about not only yellowcake, Leader of the Opposition, but also leadership aspirations and his failure.

Before I close —

Mr E.S. Ripper: You're an expert on leadership!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: The Leader of the Opposition does not need to worry about that.

Before I close I will talk about one last survey that came out —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: — last week called the “Sensis Business Index—Small and Medium Enterprises” survey. The survey has been conducted in Australia for years and used to be called the Yellow Pages survey of business confidence. It is very interesting. One part in particular that the Leader of the Opposition, the former Treasurer, might find interesting is that it surveyed small business attitudes about the impact of state government on its business.

Dr M.D. Nahan: What did it say?

Mr T.R. BUSWELL: That is a very good question, member for Riverton. Only one Australian state recorded a positive response from small business about the impact of state government on that business and that is Western Australia—the only state in Australia. I went back and had a look over eight years of historic reporting of small business attitudes to state governments. Do members know what it was? For every single quarter—the 32 quarters of the previous government's term—it was negative. It was negative, negative, negative during 32 quarters of the most sustained boom in the history of this state. What a shocking record! Do members know what happened last year in November? It went from negative to positive! What happened between August and November last year? The previous government went to the other side of the chamber and we came to this side. Therefore, we are slowly getting the runs on the board. Yes, there is a lot more to do and our challenge in government and in business in this state is to work hard to realise the potential that is now emerging.