

MEDICAL RESEARCH AND MANUFACTURING — INVESTMENT

847. Ms H.M. BEAZLEY to the Premier:

Before I ask my question, on behalf of the members for Perth and Nedlands, I acknowledge and welcome student leaders from Bob Hawke College who are in the gallery today. On behalf of the member for Swan Hills, I welcome student leaders from Upper Swan Primary School.

I refer to the Cook Labor government's vision to diversify the state's economy to attract investment across a broad range of industries.

- (1) Can the Premier outline to the house how the government is supporting medical and life-science industries to establish in Western Australia, creating quality jobs?
- (2) Can the Premier explain how this support builds on the WA Labor government's world-leading response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. Before I begin, I join all members of Parliament in acknowledging the passing of Tinesh Tamilkodi, the paramedic who lost his life last night in a horrible accident in the southern suburbs. Our hearts go out to his family, friends and colleagues for this dreadful accident and his passing.

- (1)–(2) We know that Perth is one of the most isolated places on earth, but it is also home to some of the most innovative and talented medical researchers and technicians in the world. Local advances in biotechnology and life sciences are bringing about improvements to lives all around the globe. Western Australia has a long history of great advances in medical and life sciences. As a government, we provide support to universities, through progressive government policy and through our tradition of supporting Telethon, which supports the sick and disadvantaged kids of Western Australia. To build on that history, my government is grasping at a major economic opportunity—that is, to be a world leader in medical and life sciences, one of the eight sectors we have identified as part of Diversify WA to continue to support our growing economy. By attracting medical manufacturing here, it will help us to continue to diversify our economy and create great local jobs, all while contributing to the global need for quality medical products.

Yesterday, I visited the former Pfizer-owned facility in Bentley, which was due to close next year. Its closure would have put hundreds of jobs at risk. We welcomed the news last year when global pharmaceutical company Bridgewest Group announced that it would acquire the facility, rescuing 400 quality jobs for our great medical technicians. The newly named NovaCina facility manufactures sterile injectables and pharmaceuticals with a whole range of uses, including life-saving cancer medications. The 400 jobs are exactly the kind of work that we want to see taken up. Bridgewest described the facility as predominantly substandard in terms of the modernisation needed of the equipment, but it said that the workforce was first class. Being able to plug into this great skilled workforce provided it with a great opportunity to invest in WA.

We want to do more things here. With the support of my government, NovaCina is set to expand even further. The Minister for Medical Research, Hon Stephen Dawson, and I have announced a \$2 million grant through our investment attraction fund to support a significant expansion of this facility, which is expected to create an extra 70 local jobs. Upgrades will include a new automated line to make products such as eye-droppers and a newly designed packaging line. It will also support commercialisation of local intellectual property, replacing importation needs and driving innovation and commercial opportunities.

We saw during the COVID-19 pandemic that there was a significant gap in Western Australia's sovereign manufacturing capacity. The NovaCina facility is now producing saline injectables that are part of our overall vaccine program. It remains an important facility to support. As the president of NovaCina said yesterday, if anyone goes to a hospital today, chances are they will be using one of the company's products that are manufactured here in Western Australia. Our Diversify WA strategy is coming to fruition.

Of course, our visit to the former Pfizer facility comes during a wave of increased COVID transmission. Several of us, including the Deputy Premier and I, can attest to that fact. It is important that we remain vigilant in relation to COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses. This is an expected part of the ongoing evolution of COVID-19 in the community, as people's immunity wanes over time. My advice remains the same: stay home if you are sick, wash or sanitise your hands regularly and cover your mouth when you cough. Do not visit high-risk settings such as aged-care facilities or hospitals if you have cold or flu symptoms. The best way we can protect ourselves against COVID-19 is to protect each other through good proactive behaviours. Once again, I thank the members of our health workforce, who continue to do great work to ensure that Western Australia's response to COVID-19 continues to be world leading.