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Is politics becoming a policy free zone?

Article by James Pearson CCI, West Australian column

It used to be said that good policy makes good politics.

But recently it seems that when the issue gets tough, the politicians go missing.

The list of issues that matter to business in WA, but which State and Federal government and opposition have put in the too-hard basket, is growing.

Australia's industrial relations regime is flawed. Despite its reassuring title, the Fair Work laws are anything but fair. Case by case, Fair Work Australia, the body that administers the new industrial relations laws, is strengthening the power of unions and weakening the rights of employers.

It is complicating the relationship between employer and employee, making it harder and more expensive for struggling businesses to retain and manage their workforce and more difficult for expanding businesses to respond quickly to their increasing need for labour.

But you wouldn't know that anything was wrong if you listened to the federal government. They won't even look at the issue until early next year. And there's barely a peep from the federal Opposition, because they are afraid of "work choices" name-calling by the government and the union movement.

CCI is calling for change, and to back up our words, we've designed an industrial relations system for modern enterprises in Australia and sent our proposal to decision makers across the country.

Nationally, both major parties have run like hares from the population issue. The private sector will create jobs for almost half a million workers in WA over the next decade. We need to increase training and get more people from interstate and overseas to meet the need. But few politicians outside of WA want to talk about increasing our migration intake.

CCI is calling for practical measures to increase Australians' participation in the workforce, to lift productivity and to get the people we need, including from overseas, and invest seriously in social and economic infrastructure to support them.

At the state level, demand for increased retail trading hours in Perth and the suburbs is obvious, but the issue has become a political football. The government wants to wedge the Opposition at the next election, so even though the Liberals support extended trading, they're holding off until after the next poll. The Opposition is hamstrung because union bosses won't allow a change in Labor Party policy. In the meantime, retailers who aren't fortunate enough to be in one of the special trading precincts and shoppers who don't live nearby, are missing out.

These are just three of the many issues on which political inaction is frustrating the business community. WA employers can be sure of one thing: CCI won't let these matters rest.