



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF DEBATES

Wednesday 9 March 2022

REVISED EDITION

Contents

QUESTIONS.....	1
JAMES GRIFFIN - ACTIONS OF FORMER MINISTER FOR HEALTH	1
JAMES GRIFFIN - ACTIONS OF FORMER MINISTER FOR HEALTH	2
COVID-19 - STRATEGIES	2
JAMES GRIFFIN - COMMISSION OF INQUIRY -	5
PAYMENT OF LEGAL COSTS FOR FORMER MINISTERS	5
SECURING TASMANIA'S FUTURE - SUPPORT FOR THE TOURISM INDUSTRY	6
COMMISSION OF INQUIRY PROCESS - LEGAL SUPPORT	7
SECURING TASMANIA'S FUTURE - JOBSEEKER ASSISTANCE	8
BUILDING COMPANY INSOLVENCIES - ASSISTANCE.....	12
TAMAR BRIDGE - ELECTION PROMISE	14
RECREATIONAL SEA FISHING STRATEGY.....	15
LAUNCESTON GENERAL HOSPITAL - REDEVELOPMENT.....	16
TASNETWORKS - RESTRUCTURE	17
MESSAGE FROM LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL	19
PLATINUM JUBILEE OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II - RESOLUTION AGREED TO.....	19
MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE	19
GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT	19
JUSTICE MISCELLANEOUS (INDEPENDENT REVIEW AMENDMENTS) BILL 2022 (NO. 3)	29
JUSTICE AND RELATED LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL 2021 (NO. 60)	29
PREMIER'S ADDRESS	29
MOTION TO NOTE	29
MOTION	48
HOUSING POLICY.....	48
MOTION	63
SELECT COMMITTEE - INQUIRY INTO TASMANIA BASKETBALL PTY LTD - MOTION NEGATIVED	63
MOTION	83
COVID-19 - MASK MANDATES - MOTION NEGATIVED	83
ADJOURNMENT.....	95
PETITION - KRUSHKA FORESTS.....	95
DON GRIMES AO - TRIBUTE	96
RECOGNITION OF VISITOR.....	99
COMMISSIONERS FOR DECLARATIONS	99
RACHAEL FRENCH - TRIBUTE	99
TRANSGENDER WOMEN - THE RIGHT TO PLAY SPORT	101
COVID-19 - EFFECTS ON THE HUMAN BODY.....	103
ROSS YOUNGMAN - SWIM ACROSS THE GREAT LAKE	104
BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION - CALL FOR A PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY	106

Wednesday 9 March 2022

The Speaker, **Mr Shelton**, took the Chair at 10 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People, and read Prayers.

QUESTIONS

James Griffin - Actions of Former Minister for Health

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.02 a.m.]

You have previously said that you became aware of the offending of Mr James Griffin in late 2019. In March 2020, in a letter to a Launceston General Hospital nurse, via their lawyer, former minister for Health, Sarah Courtney wrote:

I note that you suggest that the staff may be encouraged to raise the matter publicly to address some of the psychological impacts of the alleged abuse. I am advised that THS does not support raising this publicly as it would be unlikely to positively address the psychological impact and, to the contrary, may very well cause unnecessary distress for the employees and clients.

Were you aware of this advice? Was this your Government's position at the time?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I just say in relation to the James Griffin circumstances, everybody is concerned about what occurred there and we are doing everything we possibly can to get to the bottom of these matters and, importantly, to ensure that our children are safe in all of our institutions.

Regarding Mr Griffin and other matters, that is why, through the commission of inquiry, all these matters will be considered, looked at. All information, as I understand it, has been provided to the commission of inquiry and they will get on with their work. They will consider the actions of both this Government and previous governments regarding Mr Griffin.

I hope that as a result of this Government having the courage to call that commission of inquiry, moving forward we can ensure that our children are as safe as they possibly can be regardless of what institution -

Ms WHITE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. It goes to standing order 45, relevance. This is a very important question about whether this was Government policy at the time and whether the Premier was aware. I ask you to direct his mind to the answer of that question.

Mr SPEAKER - I cannot put words in the Premier's mouth. As we have talked about before, the Premier has the right and time to answer the question and he was doing that.

Mr GUTWEIN - Thank you, Mr Speaker. The point I was making is that all these matters have been referred to the commission of inquiry as appropriate. They will get on with

their work and inquire into both the actions of this Government, the steps we have taken and also the actions of previous governments -

Ms White - You were the Premier when that letter was sent. Were you aware of this advice?

Mr GUTWEIN - I am determined that as a result of this commission of inquiry, moving forward, we can provide the safety and the necessary security and importantly, for our children, that we can provide the safest institutional care moving forward.

James Griffin - Actions of Former Minister for Health

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.05 a.m.]

You and your ministers were aware of the serious allegations for a considerable amount of time before disclosing them publicly or launching an investigation. As we now know, on at least one occasion the former minister, Sarah Courtney, actively tried to prevent their public disclosure. This failure robbed victim/survivors of the opportunity to access support and justice sooner. What do you say to those victim/survivors who had to fight for transparency, re-traumatising themselves in that process, before your Government acted?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. As I have said, the commission of inquiry is going to look at all these matters. If there are questions that my Government has to answer, then there are questions that we will answer through that commission of inquiry.

I make the point that Mr Griffin's offending goes back over a number of governments of different colour. It is this Government though, that has had the courage to put in place the commission of inquiry. Importantly, we will deal with this matter and others. Our aim is to ensure that we can provide the safest care in our institutions that we possibly can moving forward.

COVID-19 - Strategies

Dr WOODRUFF question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.07 a.m.]

The COVID-19 case numbers for yesterday were over 1000, at least 50 000 Tasmanians have been infected since 15 December, and 40 per cent of Tasmanians over 16 have not had a booster. No child under 12 is fully vaccinated and vaccine efficacy drops fast. Knowing this, you have started removing mask-wearing, the single, best simple protection against an airborne virus.

The Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Liberal Senator Eric Abetz are out pushing to go harder and remove all masks, except in aged care homes. People with

disabilities did not make their shortlist of those deserving protection. So many vulnerable Tasmanians have no adequate protection against the risk of infection and disabling long COVID. We need to retain universal mask-wearing during rampant COVID-19 transmission. Are you going to cave to industry whims and political interest or go back to putting the health and safety of Tasmanians first?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Franklin for that question. I note that the Leader of the Greens, Ms O'Connor, is not asking these questions. I believe that she has put herself into such a difficult position after the rampant scaremongering that she engaged in -

Dr WOODRUFF - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I am an epidemiologist. There is every reason, with responsibility for health, that I would ask this question.

Mr SPEAKER - Sorry, your point of order?

Dr WOODRUFF - It is a point of clarification. The Premier seems to have forgotten that I have responsibility for the health portfolio.

Mr SPEAKER - I am not completely sure of what you are saying but the Premier has been on his feet for less than 15 seconds. We should allow him to at least answer the question, or attempt to answer the question, for a little bit longer than 15 seconds before we interrupt him.

Mr GUTWEIN - Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a matter that they are very sensitive about because some of the comments from the Leader of the Greens over that period from 15 December onwards, the Christmas period and earlier January, were simply disgraceful.

Ms O'Connor - The truth, every word I said.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr GUTWEIN - 'Lead to a mass disabling event', that is what you think. That we were engaging in eugenics. The language that was used is disgusting and disgraceful, and all designed to frighten people, to scare people. Yesterday I explained that unlike other premiers and first ministers across the country I have not dislocated myself from Public Health.

Ms O'Connor - No, you are hiding behind it. Weak advice.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, order.

Mr GUTWEIN - At every media event where we have discussed changes to our progress in terms of COVID-19, where we have announced plans, where there have been significant changes, Public Health has stood with me and other ministers. They have explained their reasoning behind the changes that we have taken. To make the claim that we are being pressured by the tourism sector or the business sector is simply untrue. Regarding the re-opening of our border on 15 December, we slowed the national process. We departed from the national plan. We saw other states opening at 80 per cent. We saw New South Wales removing all restrictions on the 15 December.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 45, relevance. Perhaps to people living with disabilities the Premier could just answer the question about what he is going to do about masks following the pressure from the TCCR?

Mr SPEAKER - I do not accept the point of order. There was significant preamble in the question. It is practice and precedent of this place that along with the preamble not being too long, Speakers have allowed the ministers some leniency in the length and their approach to answering the question. If there is a long preamble I will allow the Premier the opportunity to answer that question.

Mr GUTWEIN - Mr Speaker, I can understand the Leader of the Greens' embarrassment -

Ms O'Connor - I am certainly not.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr GUTWEIN - You can defend yourself however you like but it is quite clear, based on the statements that you made over the Christmas period, that you were determined to frighten and scare people -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker. On a number of occasions you have asked the Premier to direct his comments through the Chair so he does not incite interjection. He is now inciting interjection.

Mr SPEAKER - Whoever a minister is looking at when they are making their comments, I hope we all have the maturity and respect needed to be able to listen to what the answer is.

Mr GUTWEIN - As I said, I can understand the Leader of the Greens being embarrassed.

Ms O'Connor - I am not in the slightest.

Mr GUTWEIN - The extremely long list -

Dr Woodruff - Do not put words in her mouth. You are the one who should be embarrassed.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr GUTWEIN - of frightening and outrageous claims that she made. The attack on Dr Veitch through that period.

Regarding masks, we have acted on Public Health advice every step of the way. When we made the announcement regarding masks on Friday, the deputy director, Dr Scott McKeown, was there with me and took questions on the advice that he had provided.

We will have another press conference on Friday and we will talk about what the next steps may or may not be regarding mask wearing. We will again rely on Public Health advice on what steps we take, exactly as we did it at the start of the pandemic when we were the first state to close our borders, when we were the first state to depart from the national plan to look

for a higher level of vaccination to slow down our reopening. Right through this we have relied on Public Health advice and we will continue to do so.

**James Griffin - Commission of Inquiry -
Payment of Legal Costs for Former Ministers**

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.15 a.m.]

As a consequence of your Cabinet chaos, three ministers who held portfolios central to the commission's work no longer hold these roles or sit in your Cabinet. Can you confirm that the commission can still compel former ministers Courtney, Howlett and Shelton to give evidence? Will any associated legal costs be covered by the tax payer?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. My understanding is that they can call whoever they want. I expect there would be some previous health ministers who would be in front of this commission.

Ms White - I am not sure why you are smiling. Have you thought a bit more about your previous answer? What about legal costs?

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr GUTWEIN - We want to get to the bottom of these matters. We want to ensure that we provide the safest framework we can. That is why my Government has had the courage to call that commission of inquiry. I expect that the commission would want to speak with many people and that is their right. I expect that previous health ministers on both sides of politics could possibly be called.

Ms WHITE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. It goes to standing order 45, relevance. The question was, will any associated legal costs be covered by the taxpayer? I ask if you could direct the Premier to the question.

Mr SPEAKER - Again, a point of order is not an opportunity to re-ask the question. On relevance, all I can say to any minister is that they have heard the question and I expect them to deal with that question.

Mr GUTWEIN - Mr Speaker, I do not have any advice on that question. I expect that should a health minister from 2010 be called to answer questions on the way they dealt with government policy at that time and that they were acting as a minister of the Crown, then some legal support may be provided. I have no advice, but I will seek that advice.

Securing Tasmania's Future - Support for the Tourism Industry

Mrs ALEXANDER question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.17 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is securing Tasmania's future through investment in world-class events and promotion of our state to drive visitation and support our tourism industry operators?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I very warmly thank the new member for Bass for that question. I thought her speech yesterday was outstanding. The context you brought to this place regarding your own life experience will stand you in good stead. It was also important that that context be placed on *Hansard* for all members to consider. Thank you very much.

The visitor and major events economy is a critical part of the state's economy. Since we reopened the state, I have been heartened by the feedback I have been getting from around Tasmania. Events have become a hallmark of Tasmania's success, not only as a means of driving visitation and generating awareness around what we have to offer, but also because large events support so many different parts of the state. They flow through to the regional areas. People stay in the state and they spend. It is good for our economy. These events are also good at ensuring we are on the national stage and people understand just what a fantastic location we have.

When we look at some of these events like MONA FOMA, Dark Mofo, The Unconformity on the west coast, sporting events such as The Ashes, which was an unparalleled success apart from the fact that the Brits only managed to last for three days, the AFL finals, SuperCars, and events showcasing our incredible hospitality such as Festivale, BeerFest or the Taste of Summer, these events all underpin the economic and social outcomes that we see in the state.

Today, I can confirm that yet another exciting event will be taking place for the first time ever in Tasmania from next year. We have agreed to host the annual Ironman 70.3 Oceania series event each year for the next five years, with the first event to be held on 5 February 2023 in Hobart. This huge 26-event series is delivered across the Oceania region every year featuring 13 ironman events, which nine are Ironman 70.3. The 70.3 reflects the miles that are covered, and if you break it down into kilometres I understand it is a 1.9 km swim, a 90 km bike ride and a 21 km run.

The first Tasmanian Ironman 70.3 event is expected to attract over 1000 competitors and 2000 spectators. It will showcase Tasmania as a destination. These numbers are expected to continue growing over the course of the five years as people come in and realise how good we actually are.

To support this event, Events Tasmania is committing \$25 000 for each event for a total funding allocation over the five years of \$1.25 million. That is a result based on the modelling that Events had done, and an impact of around \$2 million worth of economic activity, economic uplift, per event, or \$10 million worth of uplift across the agreement.

At a time when the state is re-emerging strongly from the pandemic, this sends a clear message that Tasmania is open for business and we are welcoming people back. What a fantastic opportunity for 70.3 miles for cameras to showcase just how good Tasmania is.

Ms O'Connor - Unless they go up to Derby where you are logging those forests.

Mr GUTWEIN - Mr Speaker, again the purveyor of doom steps in. We are talking about something positive. I would not have thought you had anything against cycling or running, or swimming.

Ms O'Connor - No - forestry.

Mr GUTWEIN - They found a way, as they do, Ms Speaker. We will continue to identify and pursue these opportunities because events like these and investments made by the state in events like these underpin our economy. They improve matters socially in Tasmania as well. Importantly, they put us on the national stage and allow us to demonstrate to the rest of the country but also to the world and to the region within which we live just how good things are in Tasmania. I personally cannot wait to see that event roll out.

I was asked what the other side had to offer -

Ms White - Where are our Commonwealth Games?

Mr GUTWEIN - Mr Speaker, again the answer is not a lot. They talk down this state at every opportunity.

Ms White - We talk up integrity.

Mr GUTWEIN - I simply say to them: find something to be positive about. It is not a bad place to live.

We heard nothing more from the Leader of the Opposition than 40 minutes' worth of negativity in her response to the state of the state. Not one original idea, just a lot of reruns of negative carping. As I have said, whingeing is not a platform, complaining is not a policy, but again the Labor Opposition fails to realise exactly what they are doing and that is talking Tasmania down at every opportunity.

Commission of Inquiry Process - Legal Support

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.24 a.m.]

Information provided to public service employees about the commission of inquiry suggest that they may be provided legal advice if they are compelled to give evidence to the commission. Will you guarantee that any State Service employee who wishes to voluntarily give evidence to the commission, not just those who are compelled to do so, will also be provided with legal support, and that your government departments actively encourage State Service employees to participate voluntarily in the commission of inquiry process?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition her question. My understanding is the commission of inquiry will hold hearings to provide the community the chance to hear directly from a vast range of witnesses including academics, experts, state servants and people with direct knowledge and experience of the issues the commission is examining, including victim/survivors, their families and their supporters.

A process has been established to consider indemnity or legal assistance for those state servants who appear. The indemnity and legal system's panel has been established to consider requests by state servants and public officers for legal assistance. Legal assistance will be offered to provide advice and, engaging with the commission, provide representation when attending upon the commissioner for the preparation of written materials or submissions to the commission.

Access to legal assistance is governed by the policy and guidelines for the grant of indemnities and legal assistance to public officers for the State of Tasmania. This policy has been developed in conjunction with Tasmanian State Service agencies, unions and the Office of the Solicitor-General. The Tasmanian Government has been engaged with this right through. I note that the Government will not be providing legal assistance to alleged child abusers in the commission of inquiry; I believe that stands by itself.

Regarding requests for legal assistance, in respect to the advice that I have, to date there have been no requests for legal assistance relating to the commission of inquiry, I expect as a result of the delayed start of the hearings.

Securing Tasmania's Future - Jobseeker Assistance

Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER for SKILLS, TRAINING and WORKFORCE GROWTH, Mr JAENSCH

[10.26 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is supporting Tasmanian jobseekers into work? How is this work securing Tasmania's future? Are you aware of any alternative approaches?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Braddon for his question and his interest in getting Tasmanians into jobs. All Tasmanians should be able to get the support, skills and training they need to get a job in their local community and make a better life for themselves, and that is what we are delivering. Our ambitious \$40 million workforce growth agenda is all about supporting Tasmanian jobseekers into work and helping local businesses find the staff they need. Jobs Tasmania was established in mid-2021 in the Department of State Growth to lead delivery of this agenda working in partnership with local government, community organisations and industry.

The centrepiece is our regional jobs hub network, with \$10.6 million allocated in last year's budget to boost the number of jobs hubs to seven operating statewide providing free-of-

charge services to all regional areas of Tasmania. We know our regional jobs hub model works, with more than 1000 Tasmanian jobseekers already supported into work through existing hubs.

We are also delivering a range of programs to support employers and jobseekers, including the Job Ready Fund to help jobseekers meet the costs of essential licences or equipment necessary for a new job; the Tasmanian Employer Bonus to support businesses with the additional costs associated with taking on long-term jobseekers; youth navigators to support recent school leavers to understand their further education training or employment options and opportunities; an expanded Area Connect service to help more Tasmanians to get to work, training or education where no easy transport options exist for them; and we will shortly be delivering regional job shows and events and a Workers Connect Portal.

We are also supporting specific groups such as the Migrant Resource Centres in the north and south of the state to support the development and extension of migrant and multicultural employment and job readiness programs, and with Youth, Family and Community Connections to extend delivery of the Fit for Work project in Devonport for a further 12 months.

Today I am pleased to advise that we are now going to market to seek experienced organisations to deliver a new job-matching service. Up to \$1.2 million is available to one or more eligible organisations to deliver the job-matching service program to support people to re-engage with work or formal education and training that can lead to employment. The new job-matching service will focus on providing support to Tasmanians who are facing particular challenges or barriers to employment. It will seek to provide targeted support to those who have recently lost their job; to young people aged 18 to 25 years who may be struggling with establishing themselves in the workforce; to people aged 45 years and older who have been out of the workforce for 12 months or more and are seeking to re-enter; and migrants who have been residing in Tasmania for more than six months, have working rights and are unemployed or under-employed.

The successful applicant or applicants will deliver the jobs matching service to provide support such as skills assessment, careers coaching and employment advice to target jobseeker cohorts and will connect jobseekers to employers or relevant service providers or agencies.

Importantly, it will also work with our regional job's hub network and relevant Australian Government services and will provide referrals to and from other Jobs Tasmania programs. Over the past year, we have been delivering on our strong plan to ensure that Tasmanians have access to the training they need to develop the skills Tasmanian businesses are looking for and to make it easier for local jobseekers to fill local jobs.

Our new job matching service is an important part of our commitment to help more Tasmanians right around the state to find a job that is right for them or gain the skills and confidence to get them there. The good news is the jobs are out there. Tasmania is booming. People across Tasmania can see the evidence of our growing, recovering economy all around them and we need to ensure that they have the opportunities to get a foothold in that economy and be part of it.

No alternatives from those opposite unfortunately. Sorry Mr Ellis, I know you asked for it. We remain ambitious. We remain aspirational for Tasmania's future. We know there are Tasmanians out there who can see our economy growing and they want to be part of it. We

will work with them regardless of the relentless negativity from those opposite. We will help those Tasmanians into jobs wherever we can.

**James Griffin - Commission of Inquiry -
Participation by State Service Employees**

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.32 a.m.]

Your statements as Premier on the commission of inquiry will guide the culture for engagement across the entire State Service. Can you state clearly, so that State Service employees can be in no doubt, that you encourage and support State Service employees who want to voluntarily participate in the commission of inquiry process and that you guarantee that their jobs will not be put at risk if they do?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. To be honest, I am not certain what the point is that you are trying to make here. I encourage anyone, whether a public servant or a member of the public, who wants to bring a matter to the attention of the commission of inquiry to bring that matter to the attention of the commission -

Ms White - Would you support them to do that? Their jobs will not be put at risk?

Mr GUTWEIN - I would absolutely expect that to occur. Regarding the engagement for public servants, as I have just explained, regarding support, these matters have been worked through with unions and they have been worked through with the employer. I hope that anyone who believes that they have something that can improve the safety of children would bring that matter forward to the commission.

As I have said, we have established an indemnity and legal assistance panel to consider requests by state servants and public officers for legal assistance if they want to bring matters forward. I encourage any public servant, any member of the Tasmanian public, if they have matters that they want to bring forward that they believe are going to assist the commission of inquiry in its endeavours but, more importantly, if they believe that they are going to improve child safety in this state, then they should bring those forward to the commission. If they are a public servant they should engage with the indemnity and legal assistance panel regarding what support may be available in legal assistance.

Huon Pine Forest - Wilson River Valley

Ms O'CONNOR question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.34 a.m.]

Recently bushwalkers on the Wilson River in takayna made an extraordinary find. A Huon pine forest of a scale not seen outside the remote Olegas Truchanas Reserve in south-west Tasmania has now been surveyed and studied and found to contain trees up to 3000 years old, trees seeded at the time the pyramids of Egypt were being built.

These mighty trees are not protected. They are within a mining exploration area and adjacent to the proposed Mt Lindsay mine, a mine that would destroy pristine rainforest and divert five creeks to build a tailings dam. The Wilson River Huon pine forest needs to be immediately protected and the Mt Lindsay mine proposal stopped. This area has huge potential for tourism and to give the town of Tullah a much-needed and sustainable boost to guarantee its future.

Will you, as Premier and Minister for Tourism, guarantee the future of these ancient forests -

Mr Tucker - One minute.

Ms O'CONNOR - You are pathetic, you are absolutely pathetic.

Mr Tucker - You are always complaining about other people taking too long with an answer to a question.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'CONNOR - Will you, as Premier and Minister for Tourism, guarantee the future of these ancient forests and Tullah by scrapping the Mt Lindsay mine to protect this global treasure?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens for that question.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. The Premier has the call.

Mr GUTWEIN - I am aware of recent media statements by the Bob Brown Foundation regarding the Huon pine grove in the Wilson River Valley. The BBF has stated that the significance of this discovery means, as you would expect, that they do not believe that the Venture Minerals proposed Mt Lindsay tin tungsten project can go ahead. In fact, they called for it to be scrapped, stating that the proposal sits within the same catchment.

In reality, as I understand it, the proposed Mt Lindsay mine is located to the south-west of the Wilson River, in the Pieman catchment, not the Wilson Alfred catchment, where the Huon pine is grove located. That is my advice.

I am advised that the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service is aware of the stand of Huon pines in the Meredith Range Regional Reserve and acknowledges its significance. As it is of significant value, the stand is protected under reserve status under the Nature Conservation Act and will be specifically considered in the management of any activity or event in the area that might threaten the stand.

That is the advice which I believe the member was seeking from me. I am not sure what your point is, to be honest. We are aware of it and as I have said, as it is of a significant value. The stand is protected under reserve status under the Nature Conservation Act. It would be

specifically considered in the management of any activity or event in the area that might threaten the stand.

Building Company Insolvencies - Assistance

Mr TUCKER question to MINISTER for WORKPLACE SAFETY and CONSUMER AFFAIRS, Ms ARCHER

[10.38 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is providing assistance to the Tasmanians affected by recent building company insolvencies?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Lyons, Mr Tucker, for his important question. Our Government recognises that building a home is the most significant investment that many Tasmanians make. We want to ensure there are appropriate measures in place to protect consumers for the small percentage of building projects where things go significantly wrong.

That is why, as Minister for Workplace Safety and Consumer Affairs, I am taking further action to strengthen protections for consumers with home warranty insurance to be reintroduced in Tasmania, given that Labor abolished it in 2008, which they seem to have forgotten about.

Home warranty insurance covers incomplete or defective building work in the event that a builder has died, disappears or becomes insolvent. This is now a sensible measure to assist consumers in circumstances where this is occurring. My department, together with Treasury, is developing a model for home warranty insurance in Tasmania and we expect to release this very shortly. This will include consultation with stakeholders, including industry and consumer stakeholders, and engagement with the insurance industry, which will be completed as soon as possible. I have welcomed the views of industry stakeholders in recent months, including the Master Builders Association of Tasmania, who have been very supportive of the Government assessing options for the reintroduction of home warranty insurance.

Sadly, in recent months a small number of building companies have gone into administration in Tasmania, affecting a number of property owners, prompting this action. To ensure that these property owners are not disadvantaged while a home warranty scheme is being developed, our Government is delivering a financial assistance package during this interim period. We have acted quickly in developing this financial assistance package to assist these home owners providing cover similar to that which would have been provided if a home warranty insurance scheme was in effect. This includes claim value limits, claim verification processes and cover similar to the prospective home warranty insurance scheme.

I am very pleased to report that as at 7 March the Department of Justice has made contact with more than 50 consumers who may be eligible for financial support, following the insolvency of their contracted builder. A total of 41 applications has been received for financial assistance, of which 18 applications have been approved and payments have already been made to the value of \$606 276.17, while 23 applications are under assessment. This is providing practical financial support for Tasmanians adversely affected whilst we develop the model for

Tasmania's home warranty scheme. We are offering solutions now, not just talking about it, or calling for a talkfest.

To make a very important announcement, I also acknowledge the frustrations regarding a small number of cases where there are financial losses suffered by consumers who have paid for services, with Hotondo Homes in particular, prior to entering into a building contract. These consumers have paid for preliminary reports and tests and, in most cases, these reports were either not delivered, or are no longer of any value to the consumer. Under a typical home warranty insurance scheme these consumers would not be covered for their losses. However, our Government recognises the unique challenges faced by consumers who have preliminary service agreements with Hotondo Homes -

Ms Butler - That's great, appreciate it.

Ms ARCHER - I thought you would have been pleased about this.

Ms Butler - I am pleased.

Ms ARCHER - You could have asked the question.

Mr Gutwein - Just felt the need to be negative.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms ARCHER - Mr Speaker, I am pleased to announce that for these consumers we will provide further financial assistance to cover their losses in these special circumstances up to the value of \$10 000, noting that many paid between approximately \$5000 and \$7000. I reiterate that these are not ordinary circumstances. It is quite rare for consumers to pay for works prior to entering into a residential building contract and we certainly encourage consumers to find out their rights by contacting CBOS. Those Hotondo Homes consumers who have already been identified will be contacted in the coming days by CBOS and encouraged to apply through the existing financial assistance package portal on the CBOS website. I encourage any person who believes they may be eligible for this assistance to contact CBOS to seek further assistance and guidance.

In closing, the reintroduction of home warranty insurance will add to the range of protections that already exist under the building regulatory framework available to Tasmanians building homes. This important work will also complement our suite of building regulatory reforms currently being developed to strengthen consumer protections within our building regulatory framework -

Ms Butler - About time.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms ARCHER - and provide TASCAT with original jurisdiction to deal with building disputes for them to be resolved quickly and cheaply. Whilst the member for Lyons, Ms Butler, continues her baseless crusade to set up a parliamentary talkfest that will not assist one -

Ms Butler interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms ARCHER - Tasmanian to get on with building their home now, Tasmanians -

Ms Butler interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms Butler, you are warned.

Ms ARCHER - can be reassured that when it comes to looking after their interests, our Government will continue to act quickly, as we have done, by walking the walk and not just talking the talk.

Tamar Bridge - Election Promise

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.44 a.m.]

At the last two elections you have promised a new Tamar bridge to the residents of Bass. We understand the Department of State Growth has told the relevant councils that the project will never stack up. Did you ever intend to deliver this project for the people of Bass, or is this just another example of all announcement, no delivery?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I have to say I am surprised that she wants to speak against a second crossing of the Tamar River.

The Tasmanian Government has committed \$80 million towards the construction of a second Tamar River crossing between West Tamar Highway north of Riverside and the East Tamar Highway north of University Way. I understand that a preliminary business case is now complete with further complementary work being progressed. Cost estimates and concept design to support a full and open public consultation on the proposed location and alignment of a second Tamar River bridge are being refined by additional geotechnical investigation.

This will be a fantastic addition for northern Tasmania. If the Leader of the Opposition spent more time in the north she would realise that Legana is one of the fastest growing areas on the West Tamar with fantastic plans for a new school and enormous growth in that particular catchment. We are also seeing extraordinary growth with the George Town Council as well and right through the Hillwood area, which I am very familiar with, significant development and land offerings are being provided. What we are going to see is the Tamar Valley, over time, burgeon in the number of people who are living there and enjoying some of the fantastic benefits of northern Tasmania.

As I have said, we are continuing to progress the second crossing. We will have more to say on that matter soon and it will be a fantastic addition because it will ensure that developers who want to invest their money in either the West Tamar or the East Tamar are going to have traffic solutions that are appropriate and, importantly, we know for the growth we are seeing on both sides of the Tamar that alternative transport options and a second crossing are going to be needed.

On this side of the House we understand that our state is growing. We understand that we need to invest. We understand, unlike that side of the House, that we need to be aspirational because this is not as good as it gets, do not worry about that. As we move forward, we are going to see population growth and the need for alternative traffic solutions. That is why, under the minister, we are investing billions into our road network right around the state and, as I have said, we will have more to say on the second Tamar crossing very soon.

Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy

Mrs ALEXANDER question to MINISTER for PRIMARY INDUSTRIES and WATER, Mr BARNETT

[10.48 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government's plan to protect our way of life and the secure the future of recreational fishing in Tasmania through delivery of the Government's decade-long Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy? Are you aware of any other approaches?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Bass for her question. Congratulations on an outstanding inaugural speech. We are all very proud of you.

Tasmania is home to some of the highest participation rates in recreational fishing in Australia, with more than 100 000 Tasmanians participating, 75 per cent of those in sea fishing or in marine waters. That is worth celebrating and that is why the Government is backing it as part of the Tasmanian way of life with a 10-year strategy, as was outlined in the question from the member for Bass. We have worked on this for a long time, consulting recreational fishers and communities around Tasmania, particularly those coastal communities that rely on recreational fishing and benefit from it. It is a \$160 million injection into the Tasmanian economy every year and we know the vibrancy of those seaside towns in particular depend upon it.

That is why we released our 10-year strategy last October. It is about increasing participation. It is about improving sustainability. When I talk participation I am talking about more young people and children. I am talking about more women involved. I am talking about people with disability and providing access for these Tasmanians.

Round 1 of the Government's \$2 million Better Fishing Grants program has been completed. Community groups, fishing clubs, schools, councils and others are upgrading or building new recreational fishing facilities. I was pleased to join the deputy mayor of George Town Council, with Nick Duigan MLC, fishing guru, at York Cove. They are going to have new fish-cleaning facilities at George Town. I was with the member for Braddon, Felix Ells, Gavin Pearce and the mayor of King Island, Julie Arnold, two weeks ago at the Naracoopa jetty. There is improved lighting and access to fishing facilities on King Island.

Today, Round 2 is being launched. The department is ready to start accepting applications for smaller projects up to \$15 000 and larger projects up to \$150 000. This is

going to provide the injection that is needed to support improved access to those fishing opportunities in Tasmania.

There is an audit of marine and shore-based recreational fishing infrastructure across Tasmania. Under the recreational fishing strategy we are delivering \$250 000 for Flathead for the Future. It is an important resource we want to care for in a sustainable way. People love their flatties. I am one of those.

We have \$50 000 to improve access specifically for youth, women and people with all abilities, and a further \$50 000 to revitalise the Fishcare program. Thank you to the volunteers of Fishcare. They do a great job. They are out there at the shows, Agfest and fishing communities, encouraging and teaching our young people. There is \$450 000 for fishing aggregation devices to encourage more fish, particularly on the east coast. Marine and Safety Tasmania receives \$1 million to support recreational fishing opportunities, with the artificial reef structures off Tasmanian coastal waters in the Bass Strait and the D'Entrecasteaux Channel in the south. There has been a lot of consultation with the next East Coast Rock Lobster Stock Rebuilding Strategy. There will be more about that shortly and we will be showcasing the approach to the harvest strategies and resource sharing. We will be promoting the recreational rock lobster catch monitoring app to improve data collection. There are already 300 enrolled.

I was asked about alternative approaches. It is a big fat zero and so there is not much to say about that. We are protecting and promoting a Tasmanian way of life and backing it for the next 10 years and beyond.

Launceston General Hospital - Redevelopment

Ms DOW question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.53 a.m.]

At the last election you promised the people of Bass you would undertake a \$580 million redevelopment of the Launceston General Hospital and yet, in the Budget after the election, you did not deliver a single cent for the project. Will you deliver full funding for this project in this year's Budget, or is this yet another example of the hallmark of your Government - all announcement, no delivery?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I am pleased they are finally getting on board with our bold plans for the Launceston General Hospital. We promised \$580 million over 10 years at the election informed by the Launceston General Hospital master plan. It is a bold plan that will include a range of exciting new developments.

It includes a new purpose-built all-ages mental health precinct on the Anne O'Byrne site, co-designed with consumers, carers, family members, staff and other key stakeholders with modern facilities to support safe, therapeutic and recovery-focused care. Also included is a new tower on the current Northside site to expand and modernise inpatient and outpatient services and other important facility upgrades and expansions so we can respond to current and future demand for health services.

The LGH master plan has been completed. A fully staged program of works to implement the master plan will be ready for public release by the end of the year. This is a 10-year plan for the LGH. As I said in my state of the state speech the other day, we have to lift our eyes from the horizon and start to look over it. The good thing about the LGH master plan is that it is not captured by four-year election cycles. This is a 10-year vision to provide the investment into that health precinct that is required. I spoke about that last week in the state of the state, if the Deputy Leader of the Opposition had been listening. It backs our 10-year plans for the Royal Hobart Hospital in the south. We also have a 10-year plan for affordable and social housing. We need to start looking past election cycles and invest in plans that are going to stand the community not just in good stead today, but in good stead for the next 50 years. I am pleased to speak about the increased investment that we will be seeing in the LGH and the fact that the master plan will be available later this year. Then we will start to populate it.

We are also going to deliver the private hospital in the precinct. That is progressing very well. We are supported by health stakeholders right across the board. That will ensure we have a health precinct in Launceston that will be better for our patients, better for staff, better for retention and better for attracting the specialist skills we need. I say to the Labor Opposition: get on board, stop being so negative. The most significant policy decision for the LGH that Labor made when in government was to close wards and lock away the beds. We are about opening up new wards, opening up new beds and ensuring we have a plan, a plan which will be released soon that will outline the development that is going to occur in that precinct and the investment that will back it.

TasNetworks - Restructure

Mr O'BYRNE question to MINISTER for ENERGY, Mr BARNETT

[10.58 a.m.]

You have repeatedly claimed that through your Government's actions there will be a jobs bonanza in the energy sector. There are strong reports coming out of TasNetworks that a major restructure is about to commence, with the loss of up to 300 Tasmanian jobs. Is this true and have you or your office been briefed?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the honourable member for his question. Regarding our renewable energy plans you are quite right, those plans do include growing the economy. They do include growing the number of jobs. They do include opportunities for families and a cleaner world because of our affordable, reliable, clean electricity, whether it be through Marinus Link, Battery of the Nation or green hydrogen.

We have big plans. We have a vision, unlike the Opposition, which has no plans and no policies. You heard through the state of the state address the long-term plans and visions that we have.

I am absolutely delighted to say that we are continuing to work with our government business enterprises. With respect to TasNetworks, they have a very important role to play, particularly with respect to Marinus Link as the design and approval phase continues through

the FID in 2024. That work is ongoing, and we are continuing to collaborate with the Australian Government. We have a big vision because that will unlock untold benefits for Tasmania in billions of investment, thousands of jobs and opportunities to grow our economy and improve a cleaner environment. In terms of TasNetworks, it is absolutely terrific.

Mr Gutwein interjecting.

Mr BARNETT - That is right. Indeed, it is important in terms of our renewable energy action plan, which I think you are aware of, honourable member but it has been said before and I will say it again.

Ms White - An action plan is not actual action, though, is it?

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr BARNETT - We have hit 100 per cent, we are self-sufficient, and we are going for -

Mr O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I have given the minister enough time to go near the answer. The question was clear about the plans by TasNetworks to cut up to 300 jobs. Is the minister aware? Has he or his office been briefed on that plan?

Mr SPEAKER - The question was there.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, but there is really not a point of order because you had preliminary comments as well with respect to your question.

Members interjecting.

Mr BARNETT - Nevertheless, I am happy to make it very clear that we have big plans for renewable energy in Tasmania, 100 per cent to 200 per cent. TasNetworks is a key part of that going forward. I meet regularly with TasNetworks, as does my office, and of course they have work to do at TasNetworks. Sean Mc Goldrick is the new CEO. We have a new chair. Not only is he the chair of TasNetworks, he is the chair of the Hydropower Association internationally. We are pleased to have his role at TasNetworks. They have a big job to do. They need to manage their business effectively and prudently to ensure that we have a sustainable future for our business enterprises and that must be sustainable and profitable.

I have every expectation that they will operate in a prudent and responsible way. We have discussions in that regard on an ongoing basis, and I am sure they will continue in that way.

Time expired.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

MESSAGE FROM LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II - Resolution Agreed to

[11.04 a.m.]

The Speaker advised that the following Message had been received from the Legislative Council:

Mr Speaker

The Legislative Council having taken into consideration the following Resolution from the House of Assembly:-

"That the following Address be presented to Her Majesty the Queen through Her Excellency the Governor:-

TO HER MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY, THE QUEEN:

MOST GRACIOUS SOVEREIGN,

We, the Members of the House of Assembly of the Parliament of Tasmania, in union with Your Majesty's subjects throughout Tasmania, desire to express to Your Majesty our heartfelt congratulations at this time of celebration of the Platinum Jubilee of your accession to the Throne.

We recognise with thankfulness Your unfailing devotion to the duties of Your exalted Office, particularly as Head of the Commonwealth of Nations, and we regard with gratitude Your Majesty's sustained and self-denying efforts to secure the welfare of Your people."

does agree to the Resolution and has filled up the blank with the words 'Legislative Council and the'

C.M. FARRELL
President

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Getting the Basics Right

[11.05 a.m.]

Ms BUTLER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House take note of the following matter: getting the basics right.

With 120 000 Tasmanians living in poverty, 20 000 Tasmanian children going to bed hungry on any given night, the lowest wages in Australia, Hobart now the most expensive place to live in Australia, the most expensive food in Australia and the most expensive fuel in the country, we can easily state that we are poorly governed.

The Gutwein Government is not getting the basics right and listening to the persistent, deluded and somewhat grotesque crowing of the Government that Tasmanians have never been

better off is bewildering. It really is and most people out there in the community are also bewildered by your constant spin that we have never been in a better place. It is not true.

The expensive cost of fuel is outrageous and something which this Government has claimed since 2020 that they can reduce. They simply choose not to, or they simply cannot honour their policies, or they are completely out of touch with the cost of fuel in Tasmania and how much it is costing Tasmanians every day to fill up or, alternatively, you just cannot deliver on any of your promises. That sounds quite familiar.

I am going to quote here what the Premier said in May 2020 when it came to fuel prices. Premier, Peter Gutwein, said - this is a direct quote:

The Government would consider a fuel price cap, if necessary. If fuel prices in the state continue to be out of step, this Government will continue taking further action and will consider price capping.

That was in May 2020. That was a pledge made by the Premier and here we find that we are going up to over \$2 per litre in many places across Tasmania. Obviously, that is not too out of control or you do not understand how expensive that is for people in Tasmania because you are just not getting the basics right.

That sentiment was also backed up by the minister for Consumer Affairs, Elise Archer. On 18 September 2021 she stated that, 'Tasmanian fuel prices are heading in the right direction'. She stated that:

The Tasmanian Government is committed to reducing the cost of living for all Tasmanians and the latest ACCC quarterly report on fuel prices has confirmed Tasmania is closing the gap on the rest of the country ...

The minister, Ms Archer, still thought that we were heading in the right direction. It talks about the price of fuel being a cause of frustration for many Tasmanian motorists and this is good news, demonstrating the importance of the Government's FuelCheck TAS app. Gee, that has worked well, hasn't it?

... and website that is delivering a more transparent, competitive retail fuel industry by helping Tasmanian motorists find the cheapest fuel in their area in real time.

What we can say about the Tasmanian fuel app is that since that was introduced there has not been a reduction at all in the cost of fuel in Tasmania. In fact, it has increased significantly.

As Labor stated in 2021, we did not think that fuel app was going to reduce the prices. We raised that time and time again. We said that it was just going to be an app to tell people how much they were being ripped off at the bowser and that is exactly what has happened.

We know that nationally the Consumer Price Index rose from 1.3 per cent in the last three months of 2021 and in Hobart the increase was 2.2 per cent for fuel prices. Higher fuel prices and construction costs in Hobart are among the reasons for the difference. On 16 February 2021, the *Mercury* ran an article and the article was headed, 'Ludicrous petrol price pushing \$1.90 per litre in Hobart'.

Ms Archer - Are you alleging price gouging, not COVID-19 global prices? Ukraine. Goodness me, you are out of touch. Have you read what the economists are saying?

Ms BUTLER - The minister just called me 'out of touch'. This is a minister who said that she would do something to reduce fuel prices and so did the Premier. Minister, it is over \$2 a litre. Who is out of touch, minister?

Ms Archer - If there is price gouging. You are attacking the industry.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms BUTLER - I would say that it is you.

Ms Archer interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. Through the Chair please, Ms Butler.

Ms BUTLER - Quotes from local residents include that, 'Two years ago it was \$1.20 to \$1.40 and now it has just skyrocketed up to \$1.90', Mr Delphin said. I am just reading a quote from a local resident about how much fuel prices are just to help you with getting more in touch with the people, minister. Mr Delphin said that the prices encouraged him to make a change.

Ms Archer interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms BUTLER - Are you interested in what people say, minister? Are you interested in how people are coping with fuel prices? You are not getting the basics right.

Mr Delphin says:

I do catch the bus a lot more than I drive because it saves me money.

Another motorist from Bellerive said:

The fuel prices were beyond a joke. I think the price of our fuel is disgraceful, it is ludicrous compared to other states. I drive around a lot. I am retired. I am very conscious of keeping a tight budget.

Prices are now at \$2 a litre and the Government is still sitting on its hands despite both the Premier and the minister saying that they would intervene if prices became too expensive. In relation to the cost of fuel, the CEO of TasCOSS, Adrienne Picone, said:

Thousands of Tasmanians are struggling to get by. When a budget is tight there is rarely enough money to pay for the essentials, forcing people into insidious choices, between eating, rationing household energy, or putting petrol in the car.

I see that the minister has just left the Chamber. When will the Premier and minister Archer take measures to reduce the price of fuel for Tasmanians? It is a matter of integrity. It

is a matter of backing up what you said you were going to do. You have been saying since May 2020 that if the prices became too expensive you would step in and take measures to reduce the price of fuel. I know that you have a history of not delivering, I know that you are completely out of touch and I know that you are not getting the basics right, but on this one Tasmanians are really struggling at the moment.

It is time and it is abundantly clear that Mr Gutwein and Ms Archer are utterly, hopelessly out-of-touch as families struggle to pay the bills, and you need to act.

Time expired.

[11.12 a.m.]

Mr ELLIS (Braddon) - Mr Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on today's matter of public importance about getting the basics right. That is, fundamentally, what this Government does. We are a meat and potatoes government. We believe in jobs, we believe in safe roads, we believe in better healthcare for Tasmanians, teaching our kids in schools and making sure that Tasmania is a place where people want to live.

Anyone who has watched the last week and a half of parliament knows exactly where the Labor Opposition is focused. It has nothing to do with the basics and everything to do with smear and grubby rumour-mongering. Their entire focus in private members' time this afternoon will be more of the same. We know that the right wing of the Labor Party, the right faction, is still defending their member, but Ms White cannot even bear to be in the Chamber because of her week-and-a-half-long jaunt into disgraceful smears of a person who is grieving at a very important time, and will not even be here to support the members who apparently have rolled her strategy and told her that it is the dead-end grubby politics that everyone else in Tasmania knew it was.

We had a few points raised about fuel prices today and I will quote from *The Advocate* on 8 March 2022:

The steady climb in petrol prices has been fueled by rising global oil prices - first as a result of the reopening of economies from the pandemic, but more recently from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The rate of inflation in Australia was already 3.5 per cent at the end of 2021.

We know that global events are the driver of prices at the pump in Tasmania. If the would-be minister over there, the shadow spokesperson for whatever it is that has brought her to engage in this place on this matter, knew the first thing about fuel prices in Tasmania, she would know that they are based on global prices. The oil industry is -

Opposition members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ELLIS - The oil industry is a global industry, and Tasmania is a net importer of fuel. The tragic events in Ukraine have had profound, unintended consequences right across the globe. Any leader worth their salt knows that fuel prices increasing at the moment is a direct result of Ukraine and the aggression from Russia. Twice last week Dr Broad, who sits in this Chamber, acknowledged on the Ukraine motion that the war affects us all at the pump. He

said, 'We are already seeing the price of fuel at the bowser climb as a result of the war in Ukraine'. The on the adjournment last week, on 2 March, he said:

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia is one of the most significant events of the century. It is pushing up our fuel prices.

I do not know whether those two talk to each other. I certainly hope they do while they plot their next leadership tilt, but surely they could at least have had a chat over whether the events in Ukraine and Russia are pushing up prices in Tasmania.

We also know that economies around the world coming out of a recession caused by the global pandemic has had an enormous effect impact on fuel prices. You only need to look at the price of fuel today in the United Kingdom -

Ms Butler interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. Ms Butler, if you wish to stay in here I ask you to stop interjecting.

Mr ELLIS - The price of fuel today in the United Kingdom equates to \$3.25 a litre at the bowser. This is the result of global actions, unless there is some kind of policy link between what is happening in the UK and Tasmania. We are 33 per cent less than them anyway.

This Government is controlling what we can, which is making sure there is enough public information about where people can get the cheapest fuel on any particular day in their local area. We are the Government that introduced the FuelCheck TAS app, and I encourage anyone concerned about fuel prices to shop around and take a look at what is available. Download the app. It will give you information about where you can find the cheapest fuel in your area. That is what the state Government can control. We can make sure our consumers are informed and have as much information as possible.

If the Opposition thinks it is going to somehow solve Russia's aggression in Ukraine, which is the fundamental driver of fuel prices around the world, then I encourage them to come into this place and tell us what policy levers they are going to pull to solve the situation. What we can control in this place is making sure Tasmanian consumers have the information they need -

Dr Broad - You said you were going to fix this.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Dr Broad.

Mr ELLIS - to make decisions based on where they can find the cheapest fuel. Does the Opposition think there is price collusion amongst retailers of fuel in Tasmania? Do they think that? I would be happy to take an interjection.

Dr Broad - This isn't question time now - forms of the House.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ELLIS - I cannot wait for Dr Broad's contribution on this when he has the opportunity to tell us exactly whether he thinks there is criminal or civil misbehaviour happening amongst Tasmanian fuel retailers. That is essentially the accusation that could be assumed.

Dr Broad - Is that what you are alleging? You brought it up, we did not say that. He is inciting interjection, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. Dr Broad, you will not be here to make your contribution in a moment.

Mr ELLIS - We have a situation where prices are set at a global level.

Time expired.

[11.20 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, protecting citizens is a basic responsibility of government. It is a basic that democratically elected governments should strive to get right.

On that front, this Government is failing. Today Tasmania has reported 1109 new COVID-19 positive cases, up from 1051 yesterday. So far, since 15 December, 53 390 Tasmanians have been confirmed as COVID-19-positive. They are just the ones we have counted. Tragically 13 people have died since 15 February; 13 preventable deaths. In New South Wales there have been 1519 preventable deaths since their Premier, Dominic Perrottet, scrapped protections. None of those deaths, here, in New South Wales or the thousands of people who have died around the country, were mild. We are living through a pandemic of lies and misinformation. I am going to respond to the Premier's distortion of some of the things I said over the summer break, all of which were evidence-based and true.

Long COVID-19, which this Government never talks about, is a mass disabling event. This is confirmed by, for example, Dr Elisa Perego from the University College in London. C Mia Spring, who is the director of the Disability Justice Initiative, says that COVID-19 is a mass-disabling event. Harvard medical professor Dr Julie Silver describes the pandemic as 'probably the largest mass-disabling event since the polio epidemic'. Dr Deepti Gurdasani from the Queen Mary University College in London describes long COVID-19 as 'A chronic disabling illness'.

On eugenics, which I stand by, OzSAGE member, one of the 400 or more independent health experts, emergency doctor, Dr David Berger, says simply 'This is eugenics'. It is eugenics because it makes the frail, the infirm, the elderly, disabled, immune-compromised and unvaccinated people ultimately expendable. If you have a government that is removing mask protections, then it is removing protections for people who are already vulnerable to this virus.

I go now to a really confronting essay by Harvard law professor Jacqueline Fox, who makes the case that this is eugenics because the effect of a policy that abandons the vulnerable is eugenicist. She talks about feeling that disabled people have been completely forgotten. She said:

Despite these challenges

of a pandemic that happens in waves -

we are moving briskly towards not masking, allowing large crowds to gather indoors, planning to open schools. ... with minimal protective measures. The reduction of COVID mitigation strategies occurs against the backdrop of an aggressive political tone of unconcern ...

We have entered a new stage of erasure of children, of the disabled and of the vulnerable. Healthism and its sibling, eugenics, have been unapologetically espoused during the COVID pandemic by our country's leadership.

And Lisa Mabin who is the Director of Women with Disabilities Australia:

... I am part of a small minority who will continue to live their lives like there's a potentially fatal threat to their health, long after the lockdowns end. The realisation that Australia will most likely not be COVID-free for the foreseeable future is a painful one for me as many of our disabled and immunocompromised community will be forced into self-isolation indefinitely, sheltering from the frighteningly irresponsible public discourse that seems to be en route to having us all, vaccinated or not, going about our daily business as if Delta did not exist.

We roll out Dr Woodruff on this issue because she is an epidemiologist, more qualified than any person in this place to speak on the subject of COVID-19 and the prevention of mass infection. If I want advice on how to pull a beer, I will go to a publican. If I wanted advice about how we prevent mass infection and protect Tasmanians from COVID-19, I will go to an epidemiologist. There happens to be one sitting right beside me.

We have entered a very dangerous time in Tasmania where we have the highest chronic disease burden in the country, and the highest level of disability, according to the ABS. We have a Government that is removing mask-protections and an Opposition which is out to lunch on COVID-19. There has not been a single question from the Labor Opposition since parliament returned about the Government's manifestly inadequate and dangerous COVID-19 response. That is an indictment on this Opposition. Unless you have an opposition that can hold government to account while people are getting infected and dying, we are in a very dark place.

The Greens will keep coming in here with the evidence that we have. We will keep asking questions of the Government. We will be a voice for the parents of unvaccinated children. We will be a voice for people with disabilities in Tasmania and the elderly. We will name a mass disabling event, because that is what long-COVID-19 is. We will name Government policy that has the effect of eugenics, intentional or not.

It is Government policy that prioritises the economy and the making of money over the lives of the Tasmanian people. What is happening here is a disgrace. The Premier cannot even table the Public Health advice about the dangerous move to wind back mask wearing.

Time expired.

[11.27 a.m.]

Dr BROAD (Braddon) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on this MPI because this is a Government that is not getting the basics right. Whether it is health, education, infrastructure or budget management, this Government is not getting these basics right.

When it comes to managing the economy, we only have to look at state final demand. The last update shows that Tasmania is going backwards under this Liberal Government, contradicting the Premier's claims that the state economy is booming. We heard, with a Dorothy Dixier yesterday, the Premier talk about the latest update in state final demand in glowing terms. He tried to find a way to pick the best stat to say that the state's economy is going gangbusters.

The truth is, that December update said Tasmania was the only state that recorded a decline. The state went backwards by 1.5 per cent in the December quarter. We did not hear that from the Premier yesterday. All we heard was spin. Once again, he picked the best statistic and pretended everything is okay. We are one quarter away from a recession in this state. Yesterday, Mr Gutwein claimed that the economy was booming and business investment was growing strongly. The figures from state final demand show that in the December quarter there was a sharp drop in private capital investment, almost three times worse than the next worst result in any other jurisdiction. The Premier's boasting and bluster are not borne out by the data.

Tasmanian families, businesses and individuals are suffering from these effects. Cost of living pressures are already hurting far too many Tasmanians. When it comes to fuel prices, food prices and the price of other things, such as TasWater, going up, the Government is doing nothing about that. The Premier is not getting the basics right when it comes to economic management and the state final demand figures are there for everyone to see.

State final demand went backwards 1.5 per cent. We were the only state to record a negative result. The major causes of this fall were the 9.2 per cent drop in private capital formation. The next worst was the Northern Territory. There was a 1.8 per cent drop in government consumption, also the worst of any state. This was the December quarter, the quarter before the big impacts of the shadow lockdown, created because this Government failed in its management of the border reopening. People stayed at home and did not spend money in retail and hospitality. Businesses we heard from said their takings were down, especially for January and a large chunk of February. That is going to have a big impact on the next quarter's state final demand.

We are hearing from retail and hospitality, which our state relies on, that they had a tough month, they had about a tough six weeks. Indeed, they had a very tough time and that will be reflected in the figures, but we did not hear that from the Premier. All we heard about was the averages for the previous 12 months as a way of concocting that everything was fine. Our state went backwards by 1.5 per cent.

When you look at just about any statistic in health we see that this Government is doing way worse than when Labor was in government. They keep banging on about what happened eight years ago. If you wind the clock forward eight years on just about every measure, this Government is doing worse.

The most outrageous lack of getting the basics right is in education. You only have to look at the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy, otherwise known as NAPLAN. Our last NAPLAN results were the worst ever. This Government cannot use COVID-19 as an excuse because the other states also had COVID-19 and these results show we are slipping further and further behind our other states. The results are the worst in the nation. The retention for year 12 finisher rates are the worst in the nation, and child and adult literacy rates are at worryingly low levels. We are the worst performing state across every age group for reading and spelling, the second-worst for every age group in writing, the worst in every age group for grammar and punctuation, and the worst in years 5, 7 and 9 in numeracy. We know that as Tasmanian children move through the education system they fall further and further behind their mainland peers.

Over the last 10 years our results have gone backwards in 14 of the 20 indicators under NAPLAN. This is on this Government's head. We know that a child born in Tasmania is twice as likely to be unable to read by the time they leave grade 9 than a child born on the other side of Bass Strait, and this has happened under this Government's watch. There is no doubting it.

In her report, demographer Lisa Denny indicated that almost one in four Tasmanian grade 9 students struggled to understand numbers and basic maths. One in four are not numerate. That is 23.4 per cent from the report. How can this Government say they are getting the basics right when one in four kids is not numerate? One in four Tasmanian grade 9s cannot read well enough to understand what they are being taught. They cannot follow the curriculum. That is 28.5 per cent. How can this Government claim that they are getting the basics right when 28 per cent - more than a quarter of kids in grade 9 - cannot read well enough to understand what they are being taught? Even worse than that, two in five cannot express themselves in writing. According to Lisa Denny, 41.5 per cent of grade 9s cannot express themselves in writing.

This is a government that is not getting the basics right. Their policies are failing and they are failing our kids. That is the definition of not getting the basics right. We know that our kids are the future and we also know that results from grade 9 are the best indicator of future attainment. This is an absolute failure. If you look closer at the results, boys are doing far worse than girls. What we also heard from Lisa Denny is because students are not showing up for NAPLAN if they underperform typically, and that is something that happens across the education system, it indicates that these results, as bad as they are, are the best-case scenario. That is a government that is failing on the basics.

We know that this Government is also failing on the basics of infrastructure delivery. You only have to drive up the Bass Highway after a rainfall event and it falls to pieces. Potholes pop up everywhere. This is a government that is failing on the basics. They are failing the state and they cannot get anything right.

[11.34 a.m.]

Mr TUCKER (Lyons) - Mr Deputy Speaker, we all know Ms Butler is the hardest-working member for Sandy Bay - I mean Lyons - but I suggest to you, Ms Butler, that you take a bit of a look at what is happening globally and maybe also communicate with your member for Braddon, Dr Broad, with his comments. Ms Butler, I will read to you from the 11 o'clock ABC news report:

The Ukraine President has thanked Joe Biden for banning Russian oil imports. Warning - cost of oil could hit US \$300 a barrel.

President Zelenskyy says he is 'certain this was the right decision to make and I am grateful personally to Biden for making this decision, a powerful signal to the world. Every penny earned by Russia goes into bullets and guns.'

We know that the cost of living is a challenge for many Tasmanians and we are committed to reducing the cost of living for all Tasmanians, such as keeping energy prices low and supporting consumers to shop around for fuel. While over the years CPI rose 4.5 per cent in year average terms, CPI rose 3.1 per cent over 2021, only slightly higher than the national growth of 2.9 per cent. Some of the largest increases over the year were seen in transport, education and housing, including in housing construction costs. Importantly, wages are responding to our tight labour market, as evidenced by the wage price index data. At the same time, the Government continues to take action on cost-of-living pressures.

Tasmanian households received a 7.11 per cent decrease in electricity prices and small businesses received an 11 per cent drop in regulated prices, depending on their tariffs this financial year. Fuel prices are on the rise due to significant global issues, impacting the entire country. Our Government has acted to provide clarity on fuel price information through the FuelCheck TAS app. Consumers are encouraged to use the app and shop around to make sure that they are getting the best prices. Throughout 2019-20 and 2020-21 TasWater prices have been frozen for residential and business customers as part of the Government's COVID-19 community support package.

Despite this, Tasmania recorded the fastest growth in the country with wages, but you would not know that from Dr Doom's press release. He failed to mention it. He failed to mention that not only did Tasmanian wages grow the fastest overall for the year but he did not mention for the public sector and for the private sector as well. Wages grew at 3 per cent over the year and underpinned by the private sector, wages sector growth was 3.2 per cent, the fastest growth in the country. The public sector's wage growth was 2.6 per cent, the fastest growth in the country. Employment is at record levels at 259 100 as of January and with businesses hiring, our job vacancies are 72.6 per cent higher than before the pandemic.

Our plan to improve education and drive skills growth and invest into productivity-enhancing infrastructure will increase productivity, grow our economy and jobs and grow wages. The Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is committed to ensuring Tasmanians maintain an affordable cost of living by implementing policies that encourage a strong economy and jobs growth. We are continuing to deliver on this plan to secure Tasmania's future and part of our plan is to ease the cost-of-living pressures. We are providing \$98.5 million in TasTAFE investment, with more flexible training, 100 extra teachers, facility upgrades, new student accommodation and help for rural and regional students. There is \$10.6 million for local jobs for local people, four new job hubs in Burnie, Brighton, Huonville and St Helens - and I hope Ms Butler has been up to visit the one at St Helens; \$1.3 million to establish Youth Connectors at job hubs at Sorell, Glenorchy and George Town; \$170 000 for Devonport's Fit for Work program for young jobseekers; \$190 000 to Migrant Resource Centres for job-readiness programs; \$4.6 million for emergency food relief, including -

Ms FINLAY - Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

Mr TUCKER - Are you serious? You have to be joking.

Quorum formed.

Mr TUCKER - Obviously, the member opposite did not like what I was saying. We are also providing access to sanitary items at all government schools, almost \$2.5 million to reduce reoffending and increase rehabilitation through new partnerships to deliver more therapeutic support and programs in prisons and access to legal representation for children and young people in the north and north-west appearing in courts after hours.

Time expired.

Matter noted.

**JUSTICE MISCELLANEOUS (INDEPENDENT REVIEW AMENDMENTS)
BILL 2022 (No. 3)**

**JUSTICE AND RELATED LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS
AMENDMENTS) BILL 2021 (No. 60)**

Bills agreed to by the Legislative Council without amendment.

PREMIER'S ADDRESS

Motion to Note

Continued from 8 March 2022 (page 97).

[11.42 a.m.]

Mr TUCKER (Lyons) - Mr Deputy Speaker, people seem to realise what a great state we have in Tasmania. It is fantastic to see former Tasmanians and their families returning to the state after they were forced out by the Labor-Greens recession. We encourage them back.

I endorse the plan to invest over \$1.5 billion to provide more housing with a 10-year housing package to build on our existing reforms. This will provide further affordable housing. By adding to our already existing building program, we aim to deliver 3500 new dwellings and homes by 2026-27. We are also increasing all stamp duty and first home owner grants and concessions to a \$600 000 threshold. This will mean an eligible first home buyer or a pensioner purchasing a downsized property will save around \$11 250 on property duty when buying a \$600 000 home.

The Government is also retaining the first home owner grant at \$30 000 for the 2022-23 financial year. The previous headworks holiday program will be extended, doubling the residential land rebate from \$15 million to \$30 million.

We do not stop there with affordable housing. We continue by extending the thresholds and eligibility for our successful HomeShare program, which becomes a housing market entry program. This will allow more Tasmanians who meet our income and assets test to access this

much more generous program. The HomeShare program will be improved by reducing the requirement for a deposit and doubling the state's equity contribution. Eligible first home buyers, who would otherwise be unable to attain finance, will be able to access the package for purchasing existing dwellings, rather than building.

The Private Rental Incentives scheme will be extended from 200 homes to 400. The Ancillary Dwelling Grants Program will be doubled to allow an extra 250 places, doubling our funding commitment \$5 million.

To further assist with affordable housing, the Government will introduce resetting the tax-free threshold to \$100 000, and lifting the upper tax threshold to \$500 000, lowering the tax rate for land valued between \$100 000 and \$500 000 from 0.55 per cent to 0.45 per cent as well as making re-zoning applications easier, having more shop-top apartments and better utilising government-owned buildings.

In addition, the Government will assess the viability of build-to-rent schemes, providing safeguards for rent-to-buy schemes, to encourage the uptake of them, as well as introducing a new apartment code to simplify medium-density apartment and townhouse approvals and committing to a review of the utilisation of our social housing portfolio to gain more efficiencies.

The Premier's Address sets a blueprint for upcoming years. It is Tasmania's roadmap to recovery, prosperity and inclusion. It is supported by a decade-long pipeline of infrastructure.

A feature of the past year has been the ability of the Premier and his leadership team to adjust and pivot to each challenge. The Government's infrastructure projects are helping connect communities and improve road safety with a \$4.9 billion nationwide Roads of Strategic Importance initiative.

This Government is delivering on infrastructure improvements across Tasmania, supporting local jobs and boosting the state's economy which matter to locals, tourists, business and freight operators. In my electorate alone, the South East Traffic Solution is well advanced and set to be completed ahead of schedule - ahead of schedule. With all the road infrastructure taking place around our state and the increase of trucks on our roads, comes the issue of tyre waste. Focusing on what helps our state, unlike Labor and the Greens, who continue to bicker amongst themselves complaining about everything whilst offering no solutions, this Government has focused on reducing the 1.3 million tyres that end up in landfill or stockpiles each year by using recycled rubber from truck tyres in road resurfacing. This is why I support this Government with investing \$4 million to establish a crumbing plant in Tasmania.

The economy always sounds like a dry topic but Tasmanian's get the economic argument. If the economy is strong there are more people in work, and there is more money to invest in health, housing and education, which will underpin our future.

The 2020-21 Budget promised for Lyons and has so far delivered with a \$5 million project to rebuild the New Norfolk police station, completed and opened recently. We will be receiving an additional five police officers. In addition, \$350 million for upgrades to the Tasman Highway, Arthur Highway, for the Hobart to Sorell corridor and bypass, which is well under way, and \$12 million for the Sorell Emergency Services Hub. Works have already begun. The \$20 million kindergarten to Year 12 Sorell school also is well under way.

We have 70 commitments across the Lyons electorate to deliver. On many, they have either been started, are well under way or completed. This Liberal government is unstoppable and is focused on what is important for Tasmania and Tasmanians, unlike Labor and the Greens who seem only to be focused on rehashing irrelevant topics that are unimportant to Tasmania and its people.

If we continue to keep our kids at school longer, give them better skills and training, they will be better placed to grasp jobs and opportunities in the future. Tasmania's unemployment rate is at a record low of 3.8 per cent and the lowest in the country with the national unemployment rate at 4.2 per cent. There are more people employed now than pre-pandemic, and unlike the prophets of doom opposite, Tasmanians can see that our plan is working. People are sick and tired of Labor talking down the economy when the facts clearly show that under Labor the unemployment rate hit 8.5 per cent.

This Government has a commitment to futureproof our tourism and hospitality industries. Last month, the opening of the Visitor Experience Training office and training facility provided a central base for the team to engage with stakeholders around the state. Training courses offered through the Visitor Experience Training office are industry-led and designed to train a skilled-ready industry workforce.

Construction has begun on the first new *Spirit* vessel, the most significant Tasmanian Government infrastructure investment in the past decade. The two new ships, *Spirit IV* and *Spirit V*, will be a major boost for our tourism businesses, both large and small in our broader economy. It will bring increased passengers and increased freight.

The Government has listened to Tasmanians concerned about the cost of living pressure and calls to modernise our land tax system, which has been impacted by the surging property market. While as a share of total state revenue land tax in Tasmania is the lowest, with Western Australia, of all the states, there remains a need to adjust our land tax thresholds.

The Premier announced that we will reset the land tax thresholds to reflect today's strong property market. This promise was made when the Tasmanian Liberal Government doubled the tax-free threshold to \$100 000, meaning land tax will not be paid on land valued under \$100 000. To reduce tax payable, the upper tax threshold will be increased to \$500 000 and the tax rate for land valued between \$100 000 and \$500 000 will be lowered from 0.55 per cent to 0.45 per cent.

With housing prices and rents continuing to rise, we know more needs to be done. These changes mean around 70 000 Tasmanians will save on average approximately between \$800 and \$1625 every year, with close to 12 000 tax payers no longer needing to pay land tax at all. The new statutory authority, which has the capacity to borrow and invest with a balance sheet for more than \$2 billion, over the next 10 years will be assigned with building and acquiring an additional 6500 homes and units on top of our current target of 3500.

The past 12 months has also been particularly tough on our children and teaching staff who have adapted to shut-downs, schooling from home and returning from COVID-19 limitations. The Government, under our Education minister, Roger Jaensch, has made boosting staff our priority. The Teacher Intern Placement Program provides a unique opportunity for UTAS students to undertake their final year of study while developing practical teaching skills

in a school setting to ensure our schools have the best teachers to deliver high quality teaching and learning for all students.

There are more than 80 UTAS graduates across permanent and relief roles who have already commenced teaching with the Department of Education in 2022, including 19 who have completed the Teacher Intern Placement Program. To expand the supply of relief teachers in Tasmania there are a number of active approaches under way to ensure opportunities for current part-time teachers to seek additional availability for relief.

The pandemic has also impacted people in ways never imagined. There is a clear challenge in the mental health area. We are investing \$10.7 billion into the mental health sector and planning for the future. A new mental health facility and health services at the LGH will be included in a master redevelopment plan. There is more funding allocated to Royal Hobart Hospital master plan and the North West Regional Hospital enabling increased capacity and facilities, where stage three shall include mental health services and the establishment of a dedicated adolescence inpatient unit at the Royal Hobart Hospital.

Last year, Rethink 2020, the strengthening mental health plan, was released. Rethink 2020 signifies a shared approach to mental health service planning and delivery. This is part of the Government's response to the Child And Adolescent Mental Health Service review recommended in line with the PESRAC recommendations. As a result, we shall invest over four years an additional \$41.2 million to fully fund phases one and two of the Government's response to the Child And Adolescent Mental Health Service review. The CAMHS is funded to support children and teenagers with severe and complex mental health difficulties, as well as their families or caregivers. We acknowledge changes are needed.

Additional funding includes the implementation of a second service to be established for children in out-of-home care, a second service to be established for youth early intervention service, the capacity of perinatal and infant mental health services to be further increased and enhanced, establishment of a state-wide youth forensic mental health service, establishment of an eating disorder day treatment program and securing appropriate contemporary facilities for community outpatient services.

The Tasmanian Government takes child and adolescent mental health extremely seriously, so our children and young people can get more holistic support at the right place at the right time. We are taking the most effective approach to building a contemporary model of mental health care.

As the Premier has said, this Government is aspirational and focused on delivering better outcomes for Tasmanians today and into the future, harnessing our competitive advantages that set us apart from the rest of the world.

Tasmanians are the best for maximising potential opportunities from irrigation schemes, offshore aquaculture, forestry, farming, mining and manufacturing.

History-making for Tasmania will be the \$370 million South East Irrigation Scheme, a scheme that is expected to deliver 40 000 megalitres annually and having the potential to create more than 2000 jobs. Irrigation to farmers is gold, allowing for expansion and improvement of land and planting of high-value crops. We now need to do the same for the Southern

Midlands and deliver a \$300 million irrigation scheme which will benefit the heart of Tasmania.

You have often heard the saying - 'In Tasmania, we have the greatest opportunities - the paddock to plate experience'. The Government proposes to conduct a trial to gauge the perspective for deer farmers and landholders to supply value-added wild deer products for the regulated food or restaurant trade. This will be in consultation with the Tasmanian Game Council and other key stakeholders. This includes wild deer that will be considered part of the Deer Management Plan review. Let us hope this paddock to plate experience will be sought after by locals and visitors alike.

Two years ago, the Premier established PESRAC, the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council, to provide advice to the Government on strategies and initiatives to support the short- to medium- and long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Twelve months ago, the final PESRAC report was made public and the Government accepted all 52 recommendations across five key priority areas: jobs and income, health and housing, community and connectivity and engagement, environment and sustainability, and public sector capability.

Employment is at near record levels, with 259 100 Tasmanians in work. Our employment rate of 3.8 per cent is the lowest it has ever been in our history. The Tasmanian Liberal Government plans to support more Tasmanians into apprenticeships and traineeships. It is no surprise that this is working, is it not, Ms Butler?

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research report showed 10 845 Tasmanians are in training as at 30 June 2021, up 23.4 per cent from the June quarter 2020. We now have large numbers of trainees and apprentices starting to build their careers and in return support growth in local industries right across the state. Construction trade numbers increased by 26 per cent from 30 June 2020 to 30 June 2021, making the total number of people training in the construction industry 2315. There is an additional 635 young Tasmanians between the ages of 15 to 19 benefiting from training. This is up 28.9 per cent.

In June 2021, 25 per cent more Tasmanians were in training for trade occupations compared to June 2020. This is an extraordinary result and evidence of our strong economy. From 30 June 2017 to 30 June 2021, the number of apprentices and trainees training in Tasmania across all sectors increased by 39.1 per cent, with construction trades increasing by 77.2 per cent.

Engineering, information and communication technology and science technicians increasing by 128.9 per cent, with skilled animal and horticultural workers increasing by 90.7 per cent. These strong results are supported by our \$9 million hi-vis army plan and we will continue to be supportive through our \$98.6 million investment in TasTAFE.

TasTAFE will become a public provider of vocational education and training. This will place TasTAFE in a stronger position to meet the demands of the future and make sure every Tasmanian has the best opportunity to receive the skills they need to secure a job. The Tasmanian Liberal Government is focused on safeguarding all Tasmanians, no matter their age, circumstances, or where they live. Tasmanians will have the opportunity to create a better life. We need to deliver a TasTAFE that is more deft and skilful to operate like the businesses it was there to serve.

Under the Department of State Growth the new Jobs Tasmania unit is delivering our ambitious multimillion-dollar workforce growth agenda. It is centred on the establishment of the regional jobs hub network, comprising seven jobs hubs covering all areas of Tasmania. Jobs hubs are delivering a range of programs, removing barriers and supporting Tasmanians to transition into training and work, which include the Job Ready Fund, the Tasmanian Employer Bonus, Youth Navigators and by expanding the Area Connect service, so more Tasmanians can get to work, training, or education where no easy transport options exist.

Tasmania is dedicated to sport and has been rallying for an AFL team for some years now. Due to COVID-19 we were fortunate to host several AFL games and cricket matches right here in Tasmania. The grass is always greener on the other side and we delivered and catered for these events in true Tasmanian style. We now have a vision and an inspiration into our future regarding sports, and if Tasmania is granted an AFL licence later this year the Tasmanian Government has plans for a \$750 million stadium on Hobart's waterfront, which has been welcomed by AFL leaders. This direction shows how dedicated we truly are in having our own AFL team. The stadium will be at Regatta Point, within walking distance of the CBD, including the regatta grandstand and the foreshore below the Hobart Cenotaph. This is such a perfect place, alongside the banks of the River Derwent, creating an almighty spectacular entry to Hobart. The new stadium would place Tasmania on the national and international stage for sporting, entertainment and cultural events on a scale that has not been possible in the past.

UTAS Stadium in Launceston will remain the major stadium in the north of the state, with a \$208 million redevelopment master plan. This will be the most significant expansion since the 1960s for Launceston's sporting infrastructure. The UTAS Stadium upgrade would mean increased seating capacity for 27 500 and an adjoining indoor basketball/netball centre with seating capacity of 5000, making the high-performance sport centre capable of hosting national-level sport, competitions and events.

Dial Regional Sports Complex is to be further developed with an investment of \$25 million, to follow AFL and A-League games to be played on the north-west coast. The new stadium at Rebecca Point will bring enormous opportunities to the state, with the hosting of national and international events. To allow for all-weather playing and performances the stadium will include a retractable roof, making for a sophisticated establishment. Blundstone Arena will also continue to be the home of cricket and the Tasmanian Government strongly believes that this will be an important part of Tasmania's sporting and entertainment growth.

Before I conclude, on behalf of the residents of Lyons, I add my sincere thanks, best wishes and admiration to our first responders, hospital staff, medical volunteers and those people in the public service who went above and beyond during the past two years to keep us safe. There is still plenty of work remaining as the booster vaccines roll out during the year and vaccinations for five- to 11-year olds, but please know that your dedication and professionalism is deeply appreciated by all Tasmanians. We know Tasmanians and the Tasmanian community are resilient and I think the experience of the past two years has made us more inclusive, tolerant and generous.

Mr Speaker, the Premier Peter Gutwein has delivered his 2022 state of the state address and proven with his words and deeds that being a compassionate government and a good economic manager are not mutually exclusive concepts. He is a premier that leads a government committed to supporting all Tasmanians and I am proud to be a member of his

team. I will finish up now with a call out to all ex-Tasmanians: it is time to come home, Tasmanians need you.

[12.05 p.m.]

Mr ELLIS (Braddon) - Mr Speaker, there is nowhere else in the world I would rather live right now. You hear that feedback right across the north-west, west coast and King Island. It is not something that is said glibly. It is said with the deepest sense of conviction I have seen. Tasmania is the best place in the world to live, we all know that, but we want to aspire to something even better.

COVID-19 presented us with twin challenges: saving lives and saving livelihoods. It was at once a health and an economic crisis, so where we are as a state can be judged on those two measures. On 8 March 2022 in Tasmania only six of 211 COVID-19 hospital beds were utilised and four of 114 COVID-19 ICU beds were utilised. Of the 347 ventilators in Tasmania, more than 300 of them have never been used for a COVID-19 case. We have nearly 10 times the number of recovered cases that we know of in Tasmania than we have active cases. Our hospitals, to put it another way, are managing and our people are doing well.

On the economic side, we have the lowest unemployment rate recorded in Tasmania's history at 3.8 per cent. Our economic growth measured through state final demand is forecast to be an extraordinary 5.25 per cent. We had the fastest wage growth in the country. That, in a nutshell, is the state of our state. How did we get here and where are we going?

In 2020 we were hit, as the world was, by a new and little-understood coronavirus that originated in China. The Prime Minister closed the borders to our largest trading partners and then eventually the world. The Premier here, Peter Gutwein, closed our borders to our fellow Australians. In north-west Tasmania we suffered one of the first major outbreaks in the country and we were, as a state and as a government, rightly prepared to take unprecedented action. The outbreak in north-west Tasmania was jumped on immediately, the Army was called in, and thousands of families, some of whom I know well, were put into isolation. Sadly 13 people died of the 223 cases.

Since then in Tasmania our strategy has been clear and strong: close the borders, keep society open -

Ms O'Connor - You have infected 52 000 people.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor, you know better than that.

Mr ELLIS - glide out of restrictions, get vaccinated and open up.

Tasmanians stuck together and we toughed it out. Kids missed school, young couples, included Margot and I, cancelled weddings, our families missed funerals and births, businesses closed and workers were furloughed. That sacrifice, we should never forget, was rightly seen as worthy and temporary. Tasmanians have done their part and the Government is committed to doing ours.

We are now living with COVID-19 and our restrictions are coming off sensibly as part of that broader strategy of the glide path out of restrictions. You only need to look in the last few weeks to see that the Check in TAS signs have been removed from most venues, we have

removed restrictions now to all Tasmanians to travel and to socialise at venues, and masks are being removed in a sensible and staged approach. This strategy has bought us time. We are basically the least locked down society on Earth, with only three days in southern Tasmania in lockdown since April 2020. That is a staggering result. Others have endured 100 days of lockdown, followed by 80 000 people at the footy, followed by another 100 days of lockdown. Our strategy has worked and we owe a lot to the conviction of Premier Peter Gutwein and the sound wisdom of our Public Health advice.

We have had the same number of deaths with and from COVID-19 since we opened up as we did in those early days, but from over 50 000 cases. Each death in our society is worthy of mourning and remembrance. It is important to know in public health that disease will always be with us, and the challenge now is to manage and target our resources to those vulnerable people who need them.

Some would like restrictions to remain in place indefinitely, going far beyond Public Health advice and with no mind to the unintended consequences which were born in 2020 but have no place in 2022.

In our country we have seen this impulse before. In 1949 Australia was groaning under the weight of a wartime Labor government which had decided to maintain wartime rationing and restrictions years after the military emergencies had passed. A resurgent opposition leader, Robert Menzies, head of the newly founded Liberal Party of Australia said at that time:

The Labor government misinterpreted the vote in 1946 as an instruction, not to preserve the liberties of the subject, but to curtail them. Not to encourage the restoration of normal competitive enterprise, but to set up a socialist state.

Wise words from those times which echo through to now.

I wish to raise a couple of key trends and ideas about where the state is going. The first is living with COVID-19. There are those in this place who would have us maintain state of emergency restrictions seemingly forever. What are the alternatives? There are very few societies on Earth that are maintaining a COVID-19-zero strategy. Up until recently, they were Western Australia, New Zealand, China, and North Korea. In Western Australia, they opened up their borders on 5 March. On 4 March, before they opened up, they had 2137 cases on that day and 10 000 active cases. In New Zealand, they had 32 674 cases on one day, 28 February. They currently have 192 000 active cases. That is a long way from the COVID-19-zero strategy so feted by those who believe we can keep it going forever.

We acknowledge that China is probably the only place in the world that is still pursuing zero-COVID-19 policies in a world of Omicron. The reality is that the costs are now enormous and far out of proportion. Hong Kong's zero- COVID-19 strategy has completely failed. There are 300 000 active cases. There was recently a month-long total lockdown where people could not even leave their homes for the basics in a rural Chinese village of about 13 million people.

Those are our options if we are to pursue the restrictions forever. We know in this place there has been muddle-headedness from those opposite. Labor wanted us to open up our borders in June 2020, presumably to then face a world of lockdowns. When it came time for one of the most vaccinated societies on Earth to open up on 15 December 2021, Labor did not

seem to know whether they supported or opposed this. Their policy was whingeing and their policy was complaining.

The Greens went even further. I charitably thought of them as well-meaning but misguided. Their commentary in the past few months has been nothing but unhinged -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I take personal offence at Mr Ellis calling Dr Woodruff, an epidemiologist, and I unhinged. Could you please ask him to withdraw it immediately?

Mr SPEAKER - Mr Ellis?

Mr ELLIS - I withdraw.

Mr FERGUSON - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I draw your attention to Ms O'Connor referring to another member of the House as a 'eugenicist', and ask that she be made to withdraw. That was offensive.

Ms O'Connor - Sorry, you do not get to do that because I did not call you one.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, the issue within this House is showing respect for each other. I have asked the member to withdraw and he did that. If you have done something you should not have, I expect you to adhere to the standards that we expect of all our members. I did not hear the comment but I am going back to the member now. He is making a contribution. The contribution on the Premier's Address should not have to be interrupted. You were heard in silence. I expect the same.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Mr Speaker. On the point of order, first of all, I was not heard in silence. Could you please seek some advice from the Clerk under what standing order I should withdraw a statement that Mr Ellis did not hear?

Mr SPEAKER - I did not say you had to withdraw. I said I expect members to adhere to the standards of this place. Mr Ellis has the call.

Mr ELLIS - Do not worry, Mr Speaker, some of us who have families who have fled eastern Europe under eugenicist regimes know quite rightly how offensive the comments from Ms O'Connor are about this Liberal democratic Government trying to live with this virus and to equate that with eugenics is simply disgraceful. If Ms O'Connor does not want to withdraw that, that is up to her but people -

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Speaker, on the point of order. It is not just me. It is women with Disabilities Australia and other disability advocates -

Mr SPEAKER - No, that is not a point of order. I will ask you to resume your seat.

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Speaker. It says a lot that those comments will remain on the public record. They will be a stain on Ms O'Connor's reputation for many years to come.

I want to move on to an aspirational Tasmania, a Tasmania where people aspire to live. That is what we now see in the state of our state. Young people are aspiring to move to

Tasmania. When in our history can this be said? Sadly, the answer is far too frequently. In 2013 a former Labor minister Julian Amos wrote a famous piece called 'Tasmania: a State in crisis' about the Labor-Greens government. He said:

The recent round of economic statistics continue to highlight the fact that the Tasmanian economy is in trouble.

... The high levels of unemployment, underemployment and the low participation rate emphasise the fact that for those who do seek employment, jobs are scarce.

... Things will have to change. A change in direction is badly needed.

A change came. It was a majority Tasmanian Liberal Government that has delivered that change. Eight years on from throwing out one of the worst governments in recorded history, we now see that Tasmania is a place where young people do not leave. It is a place where young people aspire to come. With a 3.8 per cent unemployment rate, we can confidently say to young men and women right across Australia that Tasmania is a place of opportunity. It is a place where you can find a job, develop a career, have a family, buy a house and settle down.

It is something that Margot and I have done as young Tasmanians who were born in other places. It is an aspiration that we shared together. We are very proud to be part of this movement of young people who aspire to be in Tasmania, to build a life here and to raise the next generation of Tasmanians. That is what jobs and opportunity provide to people.

There are those who would seek to lock up the rest of our state and to take those jobs away. There would be those who would complain that a 3.8 per cent unemployment rate is somehow not good enough, but when they were in government, sitting on an unemployment rate above 8 per cent or 9 per cent and a state in recession, somehow that was okay.

We should be very proud as a state of the work of businesses and workers to create the jobs and opportunities, to create the exports and the livelihoods that have powered opportunities for young people here in Tasmania and for new Tasmanians to come here, to call this place home and to build a life. That is what the state of our state is, in terms of aspiration in Tasmania. All Tasmanians should be very proud of that.

I will talk about a few key ideas that are within the state of the state delivered by the Premier. The first is, and should always be, about jobs. CommSec, in its State of the States report, looks at eight measures across our economy and comes to a similar conclusion. Time and again - I think we have eight in a row - our economic performance is nation-leading. There are those who would rubbish that report by saying that it is a comparison from 10 years ago. I say, bring on that comparison because we all know who was in government 10 years ago. We have the lowest unemployment rate in history at 3.8 per cent, with 259 100 in employment. That is near a record and our aspiration is to smash that record. Importantly, despite our low unemployment rate, vacancies are 72.6 per cent higher than they were before the pandemic. There are countries around the world whose jobs have not even yet recovered to a 2019 level, yet we have gone far beyond this. It indicates that strong employment conditions are continuing and that people who are seeking training and upskilling have things to look forward to in terms of jobs and opportunities when that training is done.

We all know that these numbers do not just happen. They are not just a fluke, and particularly in Tasmania, because we so often lag behind the rest of the country. In this case, for one of the first times in our history, we are not lagging, we are leaders. This is built on the back of strong economic leadership. We capitalised on renewed national supply chain and sovereignty capabilities. We are backing mining, including in the King Island tungsten mine, where Tasmania has an enormous opportunity to play a part in one of the most critical supply chains of all.

As the war in Ukraine and Russian aggression has taught us, the capacity of Australia and the western alliance to produce the critical minerals which go into nearly everything in society, but particularly defence manufacturing, is not a want-to-have, it is a need-to-have. King Island is one of the only places in Australia and the entire western alliance where commercial quantities of tungsten are found.

After 30 years of closure I am proud to say I was there for the turning of the sod for the redevelopment of that historic mine. It has been backed by extraordinary investment from this Government, a \$10 million loan to make sure that critical mineral capacity is developed right here in Tasmania, particularly because there is no global spot market because 80 per cent of tungsten is controlled by China. There will also be a \$2 million upgrade for the electricity backbone infrastructure on King Island. I was pleased to be there with the Minister for Resources and Energy to launch that program. That mine will support jobs on the island: opportunities for young people to become Tasmanians.

Tungsten is the hardest mineral in the world and is a critical component to our defence manufacturing. Whether it is armour-plating or armour-piercing, there is no alternative to the tungsten that will be produced on that island. I am very excited that there will be further defence manufacturing capabilities from those like Elphinstone and others in the north-west and across Tasmania to turn that tungsten into the kind of equipment we are going to need in the twenty-first century when our world is sadly more chaotic, uncertain and dangerous.

There are also enormous opportunities for us to plug into global supply chains and in a way disrupting them, through the innovation that is the renewable hydrogen capacity of which Tasmania will be a world leader. For a long time Tasmania has been at the very end of a complicated, nasty and messy global supply chain for liquid fuels. For the first time in our history we have the capacity through the development of renewable hydrogen to combine our renewable electricity resources and water to create propulsion fuels which can power our vehicles and so many more applications that are critical to the economy. These currently rely on global supply chains coming from places like Russia and Iran, which are no friends to Australia and lovers of peace.

Our capacity to develop hydrogen power on-island in Tasmania has been backed by the Government and the exciting developments happening in Bell Bay, Port Latta in the north-west and other locations, have the opportunity not only to be inputs in terms of propulsion and our vehicles, but also our industrial manufacturing capability because we can replace so many of the fossil fuels of which we are a net importer with hydrogen, which we hope to lead the world in.

In terms of forestry, we also know that Tasmania's future is bright and strong under a majority Liberal Government. We are the only party in this place which truly believes in the future of the timber industry that can grow in Tasmania. We have seen what has happened in

the pandemic with global supply chains being disrupted and timber is more in demand than ever. There will be a quadrupling of demand by 2050. The fact that Australia as a country is a net importer of timber is a shameful situation that has been brought about by Labor and Greens governments around the country and the actions of Labor governments in Victoria and Western Australia speak volumes of what they really think about the timber industry. We will continue to back it because Tasmania is a heck of a good place to grow timber and it is a huge part of our contribution to Australia's supply chain. It goes into the homes and buildings that keep Australia going and it keeps providing jobs and opportunities.

I will talk briefly about our ports which are being upgraded with some historic investment in the north-west as well as our new *Spirits*. Dr Broad is still in the Chamber, and I remember him talking less than a year ago about what a terrible shame it was that our *Spirit* capacity and the capacity on our boats across Bass Strait were full. I can tell you that is a really good sign because this Government believes in increasing our exports, growing our jobs, growing our population, and the increased capacity that goes on our shipping lines across Bass Strait is a sign of all those things. Compare that to a strategy of population decline, of job destruction, of empty boats. We can be very proud of where we are at and that is why we are investing in two new *Spirits*.

It was very heartening to see last week the cutting of new steel that will go into those historic investments - \$700 million to power the north-west coast economy. We all know of the decline and decay that was wrought by the Opposition on that matter -

Dr Broad interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, member for Braddon.

Mr ELLIS - Mr Speaker, I am really proud that this Government is investing -

Dr Broad interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Member for Braddon, you will be asked to leave. I just asked you to come to order and you continually keep interjecting, so be very careful.

Mr ELLIS - Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Ms Butler interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - The same goes for you, member for Lyons.

Mr ELLIS - We get nothing but complaining when we increase our capacity and we create more jobs. It says more about them than it does the aspirations of the Tasmanian people, I can assure you.

We are seeing massive upgrades in the ports of Devonport and Burnie. They are our two largest container ports by a country mile and are critical in terms of the economic future of the north-west but also Tasmania as a whole. These historic investments will support civil construction for years to come, but even more than that, will create the capacity that our growing state needs to continue to provide the jobs and opportunities that young people need so that they can have the confidence to stay in Tasmania, grow a family and build a life.

I want to speak briefly about training because as a tradie it was the thing that set me up in life and I know you as well, Mr Speaker, as a motor mechanic and a TAFE trainer, know this more than just about anyone. An apprenticeship is the key to unlocking a decent life for so many people right across our economy. The Premier said in his state of the state:

The passage of the TasTAFE Bill 2021 through the parliament in November will put TasTAFE as our public provider of vocational education and training in a stronger position to meet the demands of the future and make sure that every Tasmanian has the best opportunity to get the skills that they need to get a job.

I could not agree more. There are enormous opportunities for us to change the Tasmanian training regime here in our state by allowing more flexibility in terms of the people we can bring on as TAFE trainers by providing more industry-led, industry-focused training for young people, so that when they leave TAFE they have the skills to continue to slot in to their employers and improve even the things that they do by making sure that training in Tasmania is innovative. Labor shamefully opposed that because they are holus-bolus captives of the union movement which sadly has seen fit to oppose and delay what is one of the most necessary and important reforms to training and education in this state in our history. We have huge opportunities just waiting for young people who can get the training that they need to take them on. The capacity to get a pay rise, to get a new job and to get an opportunity comes from fantastic training and that is what we are building in this state and which is opposed by those opposite.

We want to provide a high-vis army. We have provided \$1 million to both Master Builders Tasmania and the Civil Contractors Federation each year over four years to attract more workers to the industry and improve skills development. I can tell you, Mr Speaker, you want to be in the construction industry right now. It is a phenomenal place to work at any time, but right now, with things going flat out, there is more overtime than you know what to do with. You will be able to save up a deposit for that house, you will be able to buy that engagement ring and you will have the opportunities that you are looking for in one of the most exciting industries in the world.

There is nothing more satisfying, as every child of a tradesman will tell you, than driving around the streets of where you live and being able to point out that you built that, that you are looking after that place and to have the respect of people who know that you have their best interest at heart. That is why we also moved in extending our payroll tax incentive scheme to make sure that employers who want to take on apprentices and trainees are not sluggish with that tax. It gives them an opportunity for two years, in the case of trainees and apprenticeships, and one year for young people, 15 to 24, to remove that barrier and increase the incentive to take on those people and to train the next generation.

That leads into home ownership, and this is one of the key aspirations of young people. I am proud that the Tasmanian Government has made the bold call to support the Housing Market Entry scheme, which will mean that one of the biggest barriers for young people, which is saving up that deposit, will be significantly cut back. Now you only need 2 per cent to get into your own home. There is a state equity contribution of \$200 000. We want to get young people off the rental roundabout, because then, that can set them up for their next part of their journey.

We want to support them, not keep them in a state of needing to rent when they could pay the mortgage on their house if only they could get the deposit that they need. It is about backing the aspiration. It is about backing our young people and saying to people right across Tasmania, that if you want to own your first home, if you aspire to that, then we will be there with you every step of the way.

We are also opening this up for first home buyers who would otherwise be unable to obtain finance, to enable to purchase existing homes, rather than have to build a home of their own. There is a reason why this is really important, because a lot of young people, and we did the same, want to buy the worst house in the best street, work bloody hard to do it up and to have that family home in which you are able to put the time and energy into making that a place to call home.

If we have the support for young people to buy existing homes, they can put their energies at into urban renewal and transforming our streets in a way that will support the construction industry and support these neighbourhoods that want young people to become a part of their social fabric, and not just incentivising people purely to build new homes. Getting a decent job and owning your own home is the foundation for so much that is good about family life. That is why this Liberal government supports that and we want to see more young people on that journey.

Government customer service is something that I am particularly excited about in my new role as parliamentary secretary to the Premier, and we will be seeing a lot more about the way that we provide customer service to our people. In the budget, Service Tasmania's digital portal is an initiative that will begin the development of a digital service Tasmania to provide Tasmanians with a secure and easy access point for government services access to a single login. This portal will provide anywhere, anytime, any device access to government services through an accessible and user-friendly interphase. This is an exciting opportunity.

Tasmania was right at the forefront of government service delivery in 1998 when we set up Service Tasmania. We have an opportunity to take that to the next level where fantastic in-person services with some of the most friendly, caring and wonderful people that you ever hope to meet and over the phone as well. We want to bring that to digital so that they can take it up in the 21st century.

In 1949, Menzies said that this is our great year of decision. Are we for a socialist state, with the insubordination of the individual to the universal officialdom of government? Or are we for the ancient British faith, that governments are the servants of the people, a faith which has given fire and quality and direction, to the whole of our history for 600 years?

This is our moment for decision, where we go forward, where we live with COVID-19, where we continue to prosper, and as a state that we take the tough decisions to get back to normal.

Time expired.

[12.35 p.m.]

Mr GUTWEIN (Bass - Premier) - Mr Speaker, it is my pleasure to have the opportunity to sum up the state of the state address. Once again, I could not help but think that coming in last after Mr Ellis is a hard act to follow. Very well done.

The first point that I want to make on this side of the House regarding the contributions that I have heard over the last week and a half to the state of the state, is that those contributions were aspirational. They come from people who come from a wide range of backgrounds. We have nurses, plumbers, teachers. We have farmers. We have lawyers. We have small business people, managers from the not-for-profit sector. We have a wide representative group on our team and importantly, they are here because they all got into this business because they aspire for something more for the people that they represent.

I do not think that there could be anything more stark between this side of the House and that side of the House than one of the contributions I heard, I think it was last week, where the member for Bass, Ms Finlay, said that she had to look up the word 'aspirational' to understand what it meant. Had to look that word up.

We want more. We want better for the people who we represent. We make no qualms about that. We want to see this place do better and the people who live here do better.

In terms of the contributions that we have heard today, Mr Tucker, Mr Ellis, and yesterday from Lara Alexander, that demonstrates the depth of quality, the depth of person and their desire to see this place do better.

I must admit I was touched by Mrs Alexander's speech yesterday when she spoke of living in Romania and the desire to get out from under the yoke of an oppressive Communist regime. She made the point about her own father, as a university student, being interrogated, persecuted for the crime of having a book that was not approved. I think it was *Gone with the Wind*, you mentioned yesterday. What a dreadful crime that is for a university student to have a book that is not approved and what a terribly subversive political doctrine, *Gone with the Wind* is.

To hear Mrs Alexander's story spoke volumes for the reasons that she is here in this place: the fact that she wants to see better outcomes, wants to see the opportunity for people to live with freedom and to reach their full potential. She also made the point yesterday that she has noted that this Government will work with community organisations, not-for-profits, the business sector, because the best way that we can move things forward is if we work together to move things forward.

With some disappointment, I have to reflect on what has occurred on the other side of the House. I do not think that in my time in politics there has ever been a more negative state of the state response from a Leader of the Opposition, that did not provide one policy option or one initiative. I make the point that, over the years, we have often said on this side of the House, and I know from my time in opposition how important this is, that you need to bring down an alternative budget. You need to point to the things that you are going to do and you need to have to explain how you are going to pay for them. What was clearly evident, both in their budget response last year, and in the state of the state response from those on the other side, what was patently obvious is that they stand for nothing. They have had their opportunity now, for over a week and a half, to actually place on the public record what Labor stands for in this state and again they have failed miserably.

In terms of the state of the state address, it was an aspirational speech, but what it did do in terms of those aspirations was explain what we want to do in health, what we want to do in

housing, what we want to do in our aspirations to put Tasmania on the national stage and, importantly, the steps we are taking.

I also took the opportunity to update the House regarding where we are with COVID-19. For two years, since March 2020 through to March 2022, we have had the best response of any jurisdiction in this country. There can be no doubt at all about that, Mr Speaker. We have managed our borders sensibly. We have outlined a sensible transition plan to living with COVID-19 and, importantly, when we needed to take those tough decisions to step away from what other states and territories were doing, to step away from the national plan, we did so if it was in the best interests of Tasmanians. We made decisions that were right for the people here.

As we have stepped through since 15 December, there are some in this Chamber who have provided some of the most negative and frightening commentary that I have ever heard. This side of the House has stayed true and steadfast to the advice from Public Health and we have stepped every single step of the way through the plan, supported by Public Health. As I have said in this Chamber on a number of occasions, we have not dislocated from them, as other premiers and first ministers did. We have not held press conferences where, as a government, we wanted to speak about things that Public Health did not support. We have stayed with them. That has been difficult at times because there are some across the community who would have liked us to move faster. There are some who would have liked us to move slower. We took every step of the way in tandem with Public Health and every step we have taken has been informed by Public Health.

In the speech I delivered last week, I made the point that our state is not only one of the safest places on the planet but also has an economy that is very strong. Who would have thought in this state - certainly not me growing up - that we would get to a point where we would have a 3.8 per cent unemployment rate? We have record levels of employment in Tasmania and that means - as I know that those on my side of the House understand - opportunity. It means that those in our community who want to be aspirational and reach for more are able to do so and getting that job is the first step for them. We are in an extraordinarily advantageous position at the moment. We are viewed as being globally unique. We have what the rest of the country and the world wants, and this moment we intend to grasp.

It makes me very pleased and proud that in terms of job opportunities in Tasmania we are 72 per cent higher in growth in job vacancies than we were before the pandemic. That means right now, no matter who you are or where you live, or your circumstances or background, if you want to put your hand up for a job there are jobs available in our economy. Importantly, I talked last week about the training and skills that we want to provide and the way we have established TasTAFE now. Mr Ellis spoke about it briefly a moment ago. We want to ensure that TasTAFE can operate more like the businesses it is there to support. That is opposed by Labor, but we want TasTAFE to be nimble, responsive and able to provide the training and support that is necessary to enable Tasmanians, regardless of who they are, to get the opportunities to be trained and skilled so they can grasp those jobs in our very fast-growing economy.

I have often made the point that we came into the pandemic with one of the strongest balance sheets in the nation, in fact the strongest balance sheet in the nation. We carried no net debt in terms of our balance sheet position and we had cash and investments. When we needed to move to provide unparalleled, never before seen levels of financial and social support, we were able to, and we provided on a per capita basis the largest level of social and economic

support out of all of the jurisdictions across the country because we had the capacity to do so. We will come out of this with the lowest level of net debt on a per capita basis out of all of the jurisdictions across the country and a manageable level of net debt.

Over the last two years we instilled confidence in our community, our business sector and our investors, and they continued to spend and invest. Our 3.8 per cent unemployment rate is unheard of in Tasmania because what we were able to do as a government was to ensure that our community was safe, confident and they could get on with their lives. What we are finding, in our transition plan to living with COVID-19, is that that continues to occur.

The Revised Estimates Report which we released recently indicates that our financial position is coming back. We had an improvement in our bottom line and net operating balance. We are seeing strong growth in our revenues as we move forward, largely because of the confidence in our economy and the fact that people are continuing to invest and that is going to continue. Treasury has forecast economic growth not just next year but over the forward Estimates as we move forward, and they revised upwards state final demand from 3.75 per cent in the budget to 5.25 per cent this year and we know that last year we had one of the strongest growing economies in the country in a state final demand sense. The outcome has been extraordinary for this state and I am so very thankful that Tasmanians have worked with us as we have worked our way through this.

Regarding other matters that I spoke about last week, it is important that we move outside of the four-year electoral cycle and that we provide long-term vision in regard to Health, and that is why we have announced a 10-year plan for Health. In terms of the LGH and the master plan there - which is on foot as I understand it, and the implementation plan will be provided soon - it is that type of vision so that Tasmanians and our constituents can understand where we are going and it enables us to plan. It enables us to lay down the investments we are going to make. It enables us the opportunity to speak to the Commonwealth Government or other levels of government and talk to them about what their contribution should be as we work to improve the outcomes for our community.

In terms of Health, I noted a question this morning from the Opposition which I thought demonstrated their lack of vision and the navel-gazing that is occurring. Right through this, we have found that the Opposition have done their very best to frustrate and be negative. The question that was asked this morning was in respect of how we are going with the second crossing of the Tamar. The point I should have made this morning and one that I had forgotten was that they do not even want it. They opposed it at the election. They are wondering how it is going but at the end of the day they said they would not support it anyway. I think that says it all.

In terms of Housing and the \$1.5 billion plan that we spoke about last week, the establishment of Housing Tasmania as a statutory authority, one that has its own balance sheet that will be greater than \$2 billion when established, provides the opportunity to invest and borrow but, importantly, provides for a target of 10 000 social and affordable homes by 2032. That is a bold target but one that we have to aim for and achieve. I am certain the other side of the House will oppose this. We are going to get on with it because we believe we need to more.

Who would have thought two years ago, at the beginning of a pandemic, that two years later, as a result of the management of the pandemic in this country and this state, we would see record house prices or that we would see asset values increasing. Economic destruction

was forecast. What was forecast was the banks withdrawing from the market. What was forecast was recession. What we have seen is the opposite.

The challenge we have now with a strong-growing economy and strong-growing property prices is for the Government to do more. It needs to rethink the way it goes about things. That is why we introduced the Housing Market Entry Program. We need to give more young Tasmanians the opportunity to get their first step onto the property ladder. The Housing Market Entry program, which will replace HomeShare, is exactly the program to do that.

I announced in the state of the state we will provide up to \$50 million-worth of equity to ensure we can supercharge that program. If you are building a home and you meet the assets and income test it will provide for up to \$200 000 in equity from the Government, or 40 per cent of the property's value. If you are purchasing a home, you get up to 30 per cent equity, or up to \$150 000. The income test for many people will be an achievable test. It is about \$82 000 for a single person and \$114 000 for a married couple or couple with one child. As long as your assets as per the current HomeShare arrangements are not more than \$100 000 in financial assets or cash then you can meet these tests. We can help you get that first foot onto the property ladder.

Larger states have the budget capacity to do this. Because of our scale and the way we will be able to engage in the marketplace, we can be a nation-leader in this program. That program, in concert with Housing Tasmania being established with a target of 10 000 homes by 2032, will change the housing market in this state. The programs we ran over the past couple of years brought forward a lot of housing spend. We have people in the market now building houses that might have waited a couple more years if not for the support from the federal and state governments. As the market starts to settle, the homes we will build will fill that gap. We will keep tradies employed who will continue to provide apprenticeships and traineeships. Our economy will remain strong.

I have touched on our plan for Health. Since the middle of last year we invested significantly in Health in a COVID-19 response, but also strongly since 2014. One of the longest-serving Health ministers, Mr Ferguson, is sitting here. We have now put on more than 1500 FTEs in Health. There has never been growth in the professionals and staff working in the health system like under our Government. If you look at a hospital the size of the Mersey with a staff of about 700 FTE, since we came to Government in 2014 we have put on the equivalent staff to fund two hospitals of that size. We invested and will continue to invest with 10-year plans in capital investment for the LGH, Royal Hobart Hospital and in the north west coast and also the Mersey. We will ensure that our health infrastructure is fit for purpose.

I have spoken about housing and the fantastic opportunities that are in front of us and I hope that the other side of this parliament will support the steps that we are going to take to ensure that we can establish Housing Tasmania as a statutory authority and provide it with that opportunity to invest more, to develop more, to meet the aim of 10 000 new homes by 2032.

Importantly, I want to talk about the opportunity that we have on the national stage. The discussion that is going ahead today, I understand, at AFL House with AFL presidents, we are on the cusp of having our own AFL team. It will take until July or August before we get to the final decision point but this has been a 30-year journey for this state and I believe that Tasmania as a state of the Federation should have a team in the national league, should have a team on the national stage.

As I have often said, what sporting clubs are about is aspiration. They inspire people to win games. They aspire to win flags but their strongest aspiration, the most important aspiration is that they want to see the young men and women who come through those clubs have better and more fulfilled lives when they leave. We want to see Tasmanians, young men and women, boys and girls, have better and more fulfilled lives as well.

Right now, in terms of the national stage, you have to leave Tasmania if you want to play on it. So, unashamedly, we will continue to push for an AFL licence and, importantly, to provide this state with an entertainment and sporting venue, as we described last week. At Regatta Point the opportunity to ensure that we have a roofed stadium that will ensure that not only can we play AFL but importantly we can play A-league, we can have entertainment events of up to 30 000 people in a covered stadium. We get the opportunity to see the first landing point in this country of those major acts and international artists who now only tour the eastern seaboard and possibly across to Perth. Tasmania will be in a position where those sorts of events can land here. We will continue to push.

Importantly, we have a long-term plan for health, a long-term plan for housing. We have some of the greatest and highest levels of investment into education and we have made a significant change there in years 11 and 12 as well.

This state has an opportunity, it has a moment in front of it and when you consider the wealth of opportunities that we have that have been spoken about this morning in renewable energy, the fact that 100 years' worth of investment provides us with the opportunity to grasp a moment that has never been seen before, very clearly, Tasmania's best days are still in front of it.

In closing the debate today, I say once again how disappointing it was to hear some of the contributions from the other side of the parliament, the relentless negativity that occurred. The contributions that were made that we saw from the Leader of the Opposition, not one sensible policy option, not one new initiative announced in what was a 40-minute speech. It is very easy to be negative. It is very easy to talk down the state and what is occurring on that side of the House is that it is now permeating from the Leader of the Opposition down through each and every member who sits with her because together they have not been able to put together a cogent plan for the state. They have not been prepared to put together a range of initiatives that will improve the lives of Tasmanians and they certainly do not understand what 'aspiration' means because one of their members had to look it up.

On this side of the House we unashamedly back Tasmania. We unashamedly back investment in Tasmania. We unashamedly back jobs in Tasmania and we will continue to be aspirational because we believe that Tasmania, as good as it is now, can still get better and we want to ensure that this moment that we have is not missed.

Motion agreed to; Statement noted.

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

MOTION

Housing Policy

[2.31 p.m.]

Mr TUCKER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House notes -

- (1) Agrees that Tasmania has experienced significant economic growth, and population growth, due to increasing demand for the Tasmanian way of life.
- (2) Acknowledges that the only way to meet growth in demand is to increase the supply of housing and land, which supports our strong economy and provides more jobs and opportunities for Tasmanians.
- (3) Notes -
 - (a) the Tasmanian Liberal Government's recently announced housing package is the biggest housing investment in our state for decades, at more than \$1.5 billion; and
 - (b) that the Liberal Government's bold, comprehensive plan will deliver 10 000 new social and affordable homes by 2032.
- (4) Welcomes the Government's plan to increase first home ownership through the Housing Market Entry program, by doubling the state's equity contribution and reducing the deposit required, opening the door to home ownership to more Tasmanians.
- (5) Recognises that reductions in property costs, such as land tax, put downward pressure on rental price increases.
- (6) Acknowledges that other supports, such as first home owner duty concessions and grants, put more money back into the pockets of first home buyers.
- (7) Notes that incentives such as ancillary dwelling grants and help to increase the supply of land and rental homes.

Rapidly rising house prices are not a uniquely Tasmanian, nor Australian issue -

Mr SPEAKER - Is a vote required?

Mr TUCKER - No, Mr Speaker.

Historically low interest rates are creating cheap money which is fuelling a property boom across Australia and indeed, many parts of the world. While increasing house prices is a national trend, Tasmania's very strong local economy and the fact that our state is one of the safest and most desirable places in the world to live, work and raise a family, is also contributing because people are moving here, Tasmanians are returning home and we want them to, too.

New homes are also costing more due to high price rises in input costs. Land prices are at unprecedented levels, material prices are growing at their highest rate since 1981, recording 12 per cent growth in the 2021 year. Fortunately, Tasmania has the highest annual wage growth in the country at 3 per cent, moderating some of these housing costs increases.

The Tasmanian Liberal Government took a strong plan to the election and we have now taken the next step by announcing a massive 10-year \$1.5 billion housing package to build on our existing reforms and take further action to address affordable housing. The new statutory authority, Housing Tasmania, will be charged with increasing housing supply, delivering more affordable homes and units and ensuring we leave no stone unturned to deliver the stock of houses and the services required to cater for growing demand.

We are delivering a range of measures designed to build more houses and make it easier for all Tasmanians to get into the market. We are doing this by helping less advantaged Tasmanians by delivering 10 000 new social and affordable houses by 2032; expanding the HomeShare program to be the housing market entry program to allow more low-income Tasmanians and first home buyers with the opportunity to buy their own home. We are investing \$10 million into a residential land release rebate to unlock new land supply into the market, extending the first home owners grant; increasing housing supply with our expanded Ancillary Dwelling Grants incentive program for rentals; putting downward pressure on rent prices by reducing land tax and increasing the threshold for stamp duty concessions to \$600 000 for Tasmanians buying their first home and pensioners downsizing.

The state has committed to addressing urban renewal as part of the Hobart City Deal in the northern suburbs transit corridor. This is currently a work in progress and while the city deal partners are all working together on this initiative, the path to a solution is complex and time-consuming. Active government intervention is required, not only to identify areas for infill development but to make it happen. As a first step for the Hobart City Deal, we have been looking at the northern suburbs transit corridor and identifying opportunities where the Government can step in and activate urban infill.

We will prioritise these focus areas and work with our city deal partners to devise innovative solutions that can deliver on our commitment to build more homes. While other jurisdictions are facing the same challenges we are, the Tasmanian Liberal Government has a plan to combat rising house prices. We are getting on with it.

The Government is determined to help Tasmanians manage this difficult property market. We have a comprehensive approach to increase housing supply, which is the only way to respond to rising house values and rents. These are all sensible measures designed to make housing more accessible and affordable to Tasmanians, no matter where they are on the property ladder. I believe that we are on the way to addressing the housing shortage with the highest recorded levels of dwelling approvals and building activities since the 1980s.

The Liberal Government announced back in 2021 that we will be delivering more homes for Tasmanians with disability. In my electorate of Lyons, last year disability housing was opened in Sorell, providing six people with disability supported houses. These units were purpose-built to support people who are living with a disability and to promote independent living arrangements. The funding for these units is part of the federal government's improved social housing outcomes program. The modular units are built on suitable sites. They are affordable to build and provide adequate accommodation for people requiring supported accommodation. The supported housing accommodation units are an initiative supported by the Supported Affordable Accommodation Trust in association with Montagu Community Living. Sorell was the second home, with the first being built in 2020. In total there are 11 sites with plans to see all sites occupied by the end of 2022. This is exciting news, especially for the individuals who will have the opportunity to move into these units, giving them their own home and independence. One of the most valuable benefits this gives is hope to parents as they age knowing that continued support for their loved ones will become possible.

Tasmania has many types of housing and support available: NDIS, the National Disability Insurance Scheme; NDIA, The National Disability Insurance Agency is an independent statutory agency. The role of NDIS is to support Australians with significant and permanent disability, including their families and carers. Nest lists disability-friendly properties and vacancies. Providers such as Specialist Disability Accommodation lists housing suitable to people with a disability, including disability, community and social housing, real estate and private landlords.

The Housing Hub offers people with a disability to find suitable housing by advertising properties from a range of housing providers and also hosting a library of helpful information about housing options and planning your move. The Housing Hub covers all of Australia. Many new properties are listed on the Housing Hub every week. Created by the Summer Foundation as a pilot project in 2017, with funding from the Department of Social Services Sector Development Fund, in its first year it expanded from a few small regions to include housing located in many states across Australia. The Housing Hub plays an essential role in seeking out the types of housing people need. This information, along with housing demands, can be provided to government and developers, leading to more accessible housing builds. The Housing Hub places people with a disability at the centre of everything they do by building sustainable and innovative products that facilitate people with a disability to choose where and how they live.

Community housing is a social housing option for Tasmanians on low incomes. This option has the capability of providing more housing services due to more ways of funding their services.

The Communities Tasmania Strategic Plan sets out a direction over five years - 2019 to 2023. Communities Tasmania reflects on the Government's ongoing commitment to work with the community for the community to provide social and affordable housing.

Anglicare provides housing support through Housing Connect. Housing Connect is a free service which helps with information, support and advice, help after family violence, emergency accommodation, supported accommodation and crisis accommodation.

Tasmanians are strong and resilient. We need to ensure Tasmanian children, families and communities continue to thrive. Thankfully, Communities Tasmania supports and protects

vulnerable children, young people and their families and supporting specialist disability services. Communities Tasmania and the Housing, Disability and Community Service division are working hard together to deliver the Government's commitment to increase the number of houses available for Tasmanians in need.

In the 2021-22 Budget, \$615 million was announced for social and affordable housing, homelessness initiatives and a strategy to provide sustainable housing market outcomes to ensure suitable housing for all Tasmanians. The Tasmanian Liberal Government is investing in a comprehensive Tasmanian housing strategy, taking action to meet increased demand for social and affordable housing. It is necessary to secure Tasmania's future.

I thoroughly endorse the plan to invest more than \$1.5 billion to provide more housing with a 10-year housing package to build on our existing reforms which will provide further affordable housing. By adding to our existing building program we aim to deliver 3500 new dwellings and homes by 2026-27. We are also increasing all stamp duty and First Home Owners Grant and concessions to a \$600 000 threshold. This will mean that an eligible first-home buyer or a pensioner purchasing or downsizing property will save around \$11 250 on property duty when buying a \$600 000 home. The Government is also retaining the First Home Owners Grant at \$30 000 for the 2022-23 financial year. The previous Headworks Holiday program will be extended, doubling the residential land rebate from \$15 million to \$30 million.

As a government we do not stop there with our affordable housing. We continue by extending the thresholds and eligibility for our successful HomeShare program, which becomes the Housing Market Entry Program. This will allow more Tasmanians who meet our income and asset test to access this much more generous option. The HomeShare program will be improved by reducing the requirements for a deposit and doubling the state's equity contribution. Eligible first home buyers, who would otherwise be unable to obtain finance, will be able to access the package for purchasing existing dwellings rather than building.

The Private Rental Incentives Program will be extended from 200 homes to 400 homes. The Ancillary Dwelling Grants Program will be doubled to allow an extra 250 places, doubling our funding commitment to \$5 million to assist with affordable housing. The Government will reset the tax-free threshold - which I will talk more about in a minute - to \$100 000, lifting the upper tax threshold to \$500 000, lowering the tax rate for land value between \$100 000 and \$500 000 from 0.55 per cent to 0.45 per cent, make re-zoning applications easier, have more shop-top apartments, better utilising government-owned buildings, introducing a new apartment code to simplify medium-density apartment and townhouse approvals, providing safeguards for rent-to-buy schemes to encourage the uptake of them, committing to a review of the utilisation of our social housing portfolio to gain more efficiencies and assessing the viability of build-to-rent schemes.

I want to talk more about land tax. The strong property market has made it difficult for some to access rentals and rising property values have further impacted the cost of renting a home. That is why we took action last year to relieve some of the costs of rental properties and put downward pressure on rents. We reset the land tax threshold which provided more than \$14 million in land tax relief for landlords and property owners. Growing rental prices show there is more we need to do. That is why we are going to reset the land tax thresholds, lifting the tax-free threshold to \$100 000, meaning no land tax will be paid on land valued under \$100 000.

We will also lift the upper tax threshold to \$500 000 and lower the tax rate for land valued between \$100 000 and \$500 000 from 0.55 per cent to 0.45 per cent. This will provide cost relief to all land tax payers, with an average benefit of \$581 in the first year alone. There will be a maximum saving of \$1625. We estimate this will provide around \$39 million of tax relief for property owners, which further reduces the cost for rental properties and puts downward pressure on rent prices.

The Government has not increased any tax. In fact, in the 2020-21 year we provided waivers on commercial land where owners were experiencing hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 2019-20 year the Government also waived the final tranche of land tax accounts, amounts up to \$150, due to the COVID-19 impacts at that time.

Notices of assessment for land tax are issued progressively from October each year. Our economy and property market are strong, which inevitably means the market value of properties increase. Land tax is assessed based on the land value determined by the Valuer-General every six years. Each year between valuations, an adjustment factor determined for municipal areas by the Valuer-General is applied to valuations to account for the natural movement in land values. The adjustment factors for the 2021-22 year were determined by the Valuer-General on 26 February 2021 and gazetted on 10 March 2021. Property owners have the opportunity to object to their valuation within 60 days of receiving their individual property valuation notice and also the opportunity to request the Valuer-General to review an adjusted factor within 60 days of the annual adjusted adjustment factors being gazetted.

Land tax is assessed on the unimproved land value not the capital value of the property. By way of example, residential properties in the Hobart municipality have an adjustment factor of 1.5 for the 2021-22 year, which is applied to the most recent land valuation effective as of 1 July 2014, six years ago. The previous adjustment factor for residential properties in Hobart was also 1.5, and 1.25 for the 2019-20 year. The next valuation for Hobart was due to be issued in early 2021 with effect as at 1 July 2020, but has been deferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising property values are a sign of a state doing well, with more jobs, economic growth and improved infrastructure.

Land tax is one of the few own sources of revenue available to the state and is used to continue improving the social fabric of our society, improving infrastructure in making Tasmania a more desirable place for Tasmanians to live. Until amendments to thresholds were passed in June 2021, land tax rates in Tasmania had not changed since 2010, with the same calculation rules that were put in place by Labor when they were in government.

The only thing that has changed is the Labor-Greens government removing the previous concession for shack owners. Shack owners would be smashed for thousands of dollars under Labor's shack tax, a direct and outrageous attack on Tasmania's way of life. I bring to peoples' attention the media release released by Labor on Thursday 15 April 2021, by Mr David O'Byrne and Rebecca White. In their release they have said:

- Labor will abolish land tax up to \$100 000 and below
- Tax cuts up to four times greater than the Liberal plan.
- Labor is working for Tasmanians to deliver better housing outcomes

A majority Labor government will deliver big land tax cuts to Tasmanians.

Then it says:

Labor leader Rebecca White said Labor's plan to reduce land tax would place downward pressure on rent by helping landlords and shack owners.

I went looking in some of the Greens' media releases on land tax as well, and there is a 2020 quote from Ms O'Connor:

Madam Speaker, we were supporting the Land Tax Amendment Bill 2020. We recognise that it amends Division 2 of the Land Tax Act to include an extra exemption for commercial land in the next financial year.

Ms O'Connor goes on to say:

We also acknowledge that this amendment bill gives the Commissioner for State Revenue significant discretion in assessing applications for land tax relief.

The Greens Leader continued to say:

I acknowledge that the Premier has been adaptive to changing circumstance and needs and there have been moves that have had the support of this parliament. In fact, it was the Greens' amendment to the first COVID-19 bill that helped us make sure there was a freeze on rent increases and there was subsequently a freeze placed on evictions. The Premier has made sure there is extra relief funding there for the homeless sector and a rent relief fund has been established, which was advocated by the Tenants' Union of Tasmania and the Greens.

In November 2020, Ms O'Connor went on to say:

I simply urge the Premier and Treasurer to consider whether there is any relief that can be provided to land tax bills this year because all across the community, people are suffering. People have been dealt financial impacts and government should be able to adjust its policy somehow in order to provide a measure of assistance.

As you heard, Mr Deputy Speaker, any relief.

Last year, action was taken by resetting the land tax thresholds, providing more than \$56 million in land tax relief for landlords and property owners over four years. This year we are taking further action by doubling the tax-free threshold for land tax. Combined with the changes over the past two years, this will provide about \$220 million in tax relief for property owners over the next four years.

This Liberal Government delivered. Remember those words from the Greens, 'we will be supporting the Land Tax Amendment Bill 2020, and any relief'. Let us wind forward to Ms O'Connor's words last month in a monumental but wholly transparent look over there moment, 'the Premier, Mr Gutwein, has handed a land tax cut to well-off property investors. Yet another stunt from a Liberal government devoid of any meaningful plan to curb the cost of

living or address the housing crisis in Tasmania, another example of taking no responsibility'. What I find interesting is Ms O'Connor's previous statement. It was the Greens' amendments in the first COVID-19 bill that helped us make sure there was a freeze on rent increases and a subsequent freeze placed on evictions. In her newer statement, 'all the while, rents continue to soar and Tasmanians are forced to move interstate just to keep a roof over their heads'.

The opposition parties have rubbished the Government's claim that a \$220 million cut to land tax will put downward pressure on rent. I ask them today to prove why that will not happen. I believe it will.

[2.52 p.m.]

Ms HADDAD (Clark) - Mr Speaker, I will start where the last speaker finished off. He challenged me to prove that a cut to land tax will not put downward pressure on rent. I am afraid to tell the Chamber that the facts are already there in the history of the last attempt at cuts to land tax, after which rents actually increased in Tasmania, across the state. They increased in every single region: 9 per cent in the south, 15 per cent in the north, and 10 per cent in the north-west. Rents have actually increased since the last round of land tax relief.

I went to this in the debate in this place just yesterday. It is a cruel hoax for this Premier and for the member for Lyons, Mr Tucker, to tell Tasmanian renters that a cut to land tax will put relief on their rent, that it will reduce their rent. It is not going to happen and history speaks for itself.

If the Government wants to give comfort to people who are renting in the private market, whose rents have gone up quite a bit in the last 12 months and an average of \$6000 since this Government came to power, then they need to explain to Tasmanians how they will put downward pressure on rents. The last lot of land tax relief did not do that. Since then we have seen rent only increase. In addition to private rental costs increasing, we have seen a growing proportion of Tasmanians who are now reliant on the social and affordable housing sector.

While house prices on the private sale market go up, that is what is putting extra pressure on the cost for private rentals, as well as other factors. The result of that is that the average family in Tasmania is paying 34 per cent of their income on rent. Most people in this place would know that the national definition of housing stress is when a family or household is paying 30 per cent of their income in rent, but 34 per cent is now the average for Tasmanian families and by definition that means that they are in housing stress. When it comes to low-income Tasmanians, according to the Rental Affordability Index, 43 per cent of low-income households are in housing stress.

There is a crisis in the private rental market, there is a crisis in the private sale market, and there is a crisis in the social and government housing sector too. Not only is there a growing proportion of Tasmanians who are now relying on social housing because of the unaffordability of private rents, but there is simply not enough supply to keep up with demand. If anybody in this place says otherwise, I challenge them to show me that it is not the case that people are coming into their offices and telling them that that is the case. I know I am not on my own in being a local MP who every single day sees people coming through my office who are sleeping in their cars or sleeping on friends' couches, sometimes for periods of many years, waiting on the social housing waiting list.

Since this Government came to power, that wait time has absolutely gone through the roof. When they came to power, the wait time to be housed on the social affordable housing waiting list was about 21 weeks. That is still a relatively long wait, but that average time has now more than tripled to 71 weeks, and that is an average. We would all know people who are waiting significantly longer than 71 weeks. That is appalling. That is a sign of a housing system that is broken. That is an absolutely clear sign of a housing system that is not meeting the needs of Tasmanians.

This Government has made some very bold promises around what they can and what they plan to deliver when it comes to extra dwellings in the social government housing sector, and we know that they promised that they would be building a house a day. That is something minister Ferguson has said many times, but he was not delivering a house a day, and even if he was, that would not have kept up with the existing demand on the social housing register, let alone the Government's own predicted demand. The Budget papers show that they know that wait list is going to blow out to more than 5000 people over this next set of Budget forward Estimates. The Government knows that that wait list is going to continue to grow and even that promise of a house a day would not have met that demand, let alone the fact that it was not being delivered.

What did we see last week, Mr Deputy Speaker and the sponsor of this motion? What we saw last week was an absolute doubling down, tripling down, quadrupling down on that promise. The Government now says they are going to be able to deliver not just one house a day but three houses a day and 10 000 homes in 10 years. It is a really big promise and I hope, for the sake of the people who come through our offices, that is one that the Government will keep, but I do not have faith that they will because we have already seen that they are unable to keep their promises when it comes to housing Tasmanians.

Let us break it down. The Government has promised to deliver 10 000 homes in the social and government housing sector in 10 years. That means 1000 homes a year. To most people that would sound like a pretty big number, but the scary thing is that in the last 12-month period, according to their own Housing Dashboard, they only delivered 251 homes in one year, so how on Earth are they going to bridge that gap? That is nearly another 750 homes missing from their own promise.

What worries me is that the Government is really good at putting together really big promises, but fails every time to deliver them when it comes to housing and a range of portfolios. They make big promises that look attractive, with shiny brochures and election promises to garner votes at election time. However, when it comes to being in touch with what is happening for Tasmanian families, when it comes to being in touch with the pressures that are being faced by people struggling in the Tasmanian housing market, this Government fails every time. They are not in touch and they are failing to deliver for Tasmanian families who are doing it tough.

People cannot afford to get into the housing market anymore, people in every demographic, and that is worrying for those people, their parents and grandparents. People are just flummoxed about what is next and what is going to happen because people cannot afford to buy or rent. That grows the number of people who need social and affordable housing through Housing Connect and government housing providers, but there is not enough to keep up with demand. The flow-on effect of that means there are more people in very dangerous and precarious housing situations. There are more people who are sleeping rough. There are

more people who are sleeping in tents in and around our cities and towns. There are more people couch surfing with friends, living in unsafe and insecure housing situations and there are more people sleeping in their cars on the side of the road.

Those who can get into shelters might have a roof over their head for a little while. I know the people who work in the social housing sector and particularly those who work in emergency shelters do an amazing job, but in the last year in Tasmanian emergency shelter providers - the absolute crisis point of entry into the housing sector, shelter accommodation, emergency shelter, people fleeing family violence, people coming out of prison and not having a home to go to, people in desperate and dire need - 18 000 times people were turned away because there were no beds, and that has grown. In the previous year it was 15 000 times and in the year before that it was 14 000 times that Tasmanians were turned away. In the women's shelter alone, seven out of 10 adults and eight out of 10 children are turned away.

That is traumatising for those people and for the people working in those shelters and the organisations that fund them and support them, because they are desperate too. They do not want to be turning people away. It is an unfair and cruel situation that they are put in to have to turn people away. They having to do that because there is not enough transitional and social and affordable housing for people to rent and the private rental sector is absolutely stretched and unaffordable. Even if people can find a place to rent it is usually outside their budget, and we know people are already in housing stress and that is only going to grow.

This Government can say that it is market forces and it is the Tasmanian way of life and there are all these reasons why these things have gone up in price, but it is actually eight years of inaction in this portfolio area that has led to this Government failing to deliver when it comes to housing promises, eight years of failing to prioritise the Housing portfolio. They inherited something that looked very different from what we see right now and, as I have already said, wait lists and wait times are now at some of the highest levels we have ever seen.

Mr Deputy Speaker, there are 120 000 Tasmanians living below the poverty line. Many of those are those people who are trying desperately to get into the housing market in any way they can. I shared some personal stories from a few constituents yesterday in one of my contributions in this place. I want to share another one today that a constituent has asked to me to share. He has asked me not to share his name so I will call him John Smith - that is not his real name. He has been homeless for 66 weeks, a period covering two winters. He has been sleeping in his car and is very fearful that he will spend a third winter sleeping in his car. He is one of those people who is falling through the cracks. Overnight we had the coldest night recorded so far for 2022; that is what the Bureau of Meteorology was reporting this morning. Things are only going to get harder for my constituent. He has done what he can, including getting doctors' reports to explain his serious need for housing. It should be enough that an individual in the community can make it clear that their need for housing is a very serious one. More often than not people are resorting to having to have extra evidence of their need for housing, including doctors' reports. His doctor wrote a letter to support his patient's housing need. He said:

You may know that Mr Smith became homeless following a relationship breakup. He is sleeping in his car. He showers and cleans his clothes at the showgrounds. He has stayed a few nights at several shelters in and around Hobart but he has had his bedding and clothing and other belongings stolen.

He has significant medical issues, including chronic pain, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, insomnia and he is currently significantly depressed.

Sadly he has also shared with my office the fact that he has had suicidal ideation. He has family who live in another part of the state and they are sometimes able to travel to support him. His doctor says that he is very concerned about his patient's mental state. He was very teary and dysrhythmic when he last saw him. He has been changed onto a different medication. He will be reviewing him weekly.

He is in the priority category. He has been preapproved for private rental assistance; he has expanded the number of suburbs. I have constituents in my office who have said they will go anywhere in Tasmania. They will go wherever they can have a roof over their head. Those people are still sleeping in their car. That is how stretched the housing system is right now.

People like Mr Smith lose hope. When you do not have a roof over your head, you cannot deal with all of the other things you have to do in your life. It is near impossible to do things like prioritising finding work, be engaged in family connections, dealing with your own mental health and physical health, when every single day you wake up you do not know where you are going to sleep that night. You do not know if you are going to eat that day. That is the reality for a growing cohort of Tasmanians.

It is only going to get worse. The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation late last month said that Sydney and Hobart are Australia's two least affordable cities, with less than 10 per cent of properties being affordable to the bottom 60 per cent of income earners in those two markets. We can all say no-one saw this kind of housing boom on the horizon for Tasmania. We were always seen as an affordable place to live. That is not the case anymore.

Part of the reason for that is that this Government has failed to plan. It therefore fails to deliver. They have deprioritised the Housing portfolio from the minute they came to Government. We are seeing the results of that in action now. We are seeing the results of that inaction every time people walk into our offices seeking support, or walk into their doctor's office seeking support for their housing application.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I note that the mover of the motion, yourself, has not called for a vote on this motion today. I will foreshadow that if your intention is to bring this back for debate at another time, then I would seek to amend on behalf of the Opposition the wording of the motion. The amendment that I foreshadow would read along the lines of this: that all the words following the words, 'That the House' are deleted and replaced with:

- (1) Acknowledges the growing housing crisis facing Tasmanians across every part of the housing sector, including homelessness, social housing, government housing, private rentals and homeownership;
- (2) Notes that since the Liberal Government came to power the housing waitlist has blown out from 2400 to 4300 and that the average wait time to be housed has grown from 21 weeks to over 71 weeks;

- (3) Notes that the Housing minister's promise to build a house a day is not being met. Even if it were it would not keep up with existing let alone the Government's own predicted future demand;
- (4) Notes that to fulfil their recent promise to build 10 000 homes in 10 years they would have to deliver 1000 homes per year and that in the last 12-month period they delivered only 251;
- (5) Recognises the pressure the short-stay accommodation market has put on the cost and availability of private rental properties and agrees to implement an immediate pause on new permits for short-stay accommodation for whole dwellings statewide until Tasmanians are adequately housed; and
- (6) Notes that the Tasmanian public has lost faith that the Government will be able to deliver on their housing promises.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Are you going to move that amendment now?

Ms HADDAD - No, I am just foreshadowing it because I note that you have not -

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - If you do not move that now you will not have a possibility next time to do it. You will not get another option, correct? The motion will be adjourned and you will not be able to move your amendment then.

Ms HADDAD - Your motion will be adjourned?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Yes.

Ms HADDAD - You are not intending to bring it back for debate at a later time? I note that at the beginning of your contribution you indicated that you were not seeking a vote on this motion today.

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Deputy Speaker, if I may, on your indulgence. To assist the House, it is perhaps not fair on the person who is occupying the Chair at the moment to participate in the debate, so I stand to facilitate in that respect.

The Deputy Speaker is supporting the Speaker who needs a break from the Chair. When Mr Tucker is able to participate again as an ordinary member of the House he will speak for himself.

The mover of the motion has stated to me during the day that we intend to bring the matter back for debate at a later hour if time beats us today. I hope that is of assistance to the House.

Ms HADDAD - Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the minister for that clarification. I do not intend to formally move that amendment today but I will foreshadow that when the motion comes back for debate I may move an amendment in similar words. There will be other speakers hoping to contribute to today's motion. I will conclude my

comments with those that I have already made and look forward to continuing to debate this important issue in the future.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - You will not get another opportunity to speak -

Ms HADDAD - To amend at all?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - To put that amendment forward because you will not get another - you do not want to do that?

Ms HADDAD - No.

[3.13 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing) - Mr Speaker, I want to speak on this important matter. I thank the mover of the motion, Mr Tucker, for his outstanding work in promoting better housing outcomes as part of the Gutwein majority Liberal government. Mr Tucker has been a keen watcher of housing and policies and has been promoting policies that will drive even greater innovation and greater investment by the state Government into social and affordable housing. We will not be stopping there. Mr Tucker, together with all of our Liberal team, is interested in working closely with the community sector and the private sector in a tripartite partnership approach in driving more investment for private dwellings.

We are in the happy circumstance in Tasmania that a trend which has dogged this state for decades is well and truly behind us. I grew up in a state where we had the brain-drain and where high schools finished at grade 10. You were either sent off to get a job after year 10 or if you were considered 'smart' you might get a start at university. If you were super bright you might have to leave the state altogether, even if you had graduated with a qualification. If you did not fit into those categories you were thrown on the unemployment scrapheap. Those days are gone, and I say long may be they gone behind us, because Tasmania today is a far different place and I am glad for it. Young people today have the opportunity to grow up in a state very different from the one I grew up in, in which the economy is strong, the jobs market is thriving, the small and large business communities are very confident, and investment appetite is as great as it has ever been in the state's history, indeed greater.

As the Premier outlined in his summing-up of the Premier's Address earlier today, to think that the unemployment rate has reached 3.8 per cent, it has never been that in the history of Tasmania. That is a reflection of the growing labour market in Tasmania where businesses have been offering more skilled and unskilled employment into the labour market and people have been employed. It has also meant that Tasmania has become a magnet for people from other states to call Tasmania home. I am very proud and grateful that many of those people who have migrated to Tasmania are actually returning Tasmanians. They have come back home because there is opportunity here.

The Government openly acknowledges that this has placed increased pressure on housing. One thing that no-one from the Opposition has yet acknowledged is that Tasmania's increase in housing prices and the consequent increases that places on rents is something that is occurring around the nation and to a certain extent that is putting pressure on people with housing affordability. For people who already own a home or are paying off a mortgage in their own home, naturally that has increased their wealth, but it has put pressure on people who

are renting because we know the stock of available housing as a ratio of people has come under pressure. This is because there are more people moving to Tasmania and calling it home.

When people from Victoria or New South Wales or Western Australia move to Tasmania, they pack up their car and family and goods to bring across but they do not bring a home with them, so the influx of people with our growing population has put pressure on housing. It is about time the Opposition acknowledges that. We have had a combined commitment across politics in this state - though perhaps not the Greens - to grow the population so we can reach Tasmania's liveability goals so we can meet some of those school shortages and can get qualified doctors in some of those subspecialties to provide healthcare to Tasmanians. That is happening and I am very glad it is. All these effects compound and put pressure on the housing system.

In September 2021 we saw something of a record in Tasmania's private building sector. The private residential building sector saw more than 3000 completions of private residential dwellings in Tasmania. People are responding to the liveability incentives of calling Tasmania home and the Home Builder Program, which has been a magnificent success as a joint initiative between the Morrison Liberal Government and the Tasmanian Gutwein Liberal Government. We have also seen in that same period 4000 new starts.

Yesterday, Mrs Alexander made a stunning contribution to this House when she advocated for policies that will put downward pressure on criminal rates, upward support and encouragement on people's health and mental health and improve people's prospects around education and a range of social indicators where they have access to sustainable, safe and secure housing. Mrs Alexander also made a vital point that seems to be lost on so many people opposite, and that is the best way the Government can act here is with a healthy dose of respect for the private sector and the community sector working with government and finding the right partnerships to achieve that.

One of the most heartwarming and educational experiences I have had is spending time with the 17 fantastic, committed young Tasmanians who make up St Joseph's Affordable Homes. This is an innovation of the historically often criticised Catholic Church. I proudly speak up for what the Catholic Church has done in Tasmania. They set this up and have done what governments and others have maybe not got around to doing. They have created a social enterprise for people on the margins of society who have grown up at times in some circumstances of generational unemployment, and they have given them a fresh vision.

How about that word 'aspiration'? They have given them aspiration - 'Young women, young men, we can offer you the opportunity to work in St Joseph's Affordable Homes. Not only would you be building houses, flats and units for people in your own community, maybe people you care about who are on the Housing Register who are waiting to safe secure housing, but we will also give you employment, money in your pocket, skills development and training, and ultimately your own trade certificate.' These young people are not the tradies of the future, they are the tradies of today and I am just so impressed with them.

Sienna was the one who made a real impression on me. She calls herself the lady tradie and she wears her pink fluoro proudly. People like Sienna give me great hope. We have a lot to be grateful for in this state. I am impressed by them and I want to see more of it. I would also like to see it in the north, because this has been pioneered here in the south.

Mr Speaker, it is that maturity of common purpose that is giving us fantastic outcomes, because for a state government investment of around \$850 000, by partnering with the Catholic Church and Centacare Evolve Housing, and by coming up with innovation with long-term contracts for them, they are able to see an investment of more than \$2 million take place and all those new dwellings available - I think there were six at Jackson Street, Glenorchy - new homes for people who need those homes.

Ms Haddad is so far very open with her criticism but very closed when it comes to solutions. The Labor Party has offered this House nothing when it comes to different ways or new ideas - zero. I continue to wait for the big moment, such as last Wednesday when Ms White, the Opposition Leader, wanted to run off the usual criticism on Housing, but I was just waiting for a solution, an idea, something, and what did we get? Nothing.

Through you, Mr Speaker, I say to Ms Haddad, be part of the solution. I have heard your amendment read into the record but it does not add to supply. What we need to meet growing demand is more supply. I far prefer the suggestion from Mrs Alexander than the vacuous Opposition who continue to criticise but have nothing to offer. I take it as a badge of honour that our targets are for 1500 by June of next year, 2000 to 2027 and a further 6500 by 2032. They are the targets that this growing state needs. It is about time that we have more goal setting and future budget planning that goes beyond the electoral cycles.

It is the case that at the last election, less than one year ago, Ms Haddad and her team were agreeing with the Government that we needed 1500 by 2023 and a further 2000 by 2027, a moment of bipartisanship, but it has been critical ever since, when the Government is on track to deliver those funds. Ms Haddad and the Labor Party should be saying, 'Good on you, Government, you are meeting your target but we would like to have longer-term targets', but we are not hearing that. It is just the same old oppositional stance of the Labor Party who have no policies, but they would rather get a headline than a new idea to be considered.

We will press forward. We have huge ambition here, massive, and it is not just about government funding social and affordable housing, although that is a big part of it. With a target that is worth \$1.5 billion over the next 10 years, we ought to do that. I am committed to that, as is every member of this side of the House, and as is the community sector, but we also have to do more to support home ownership and help people who want to escape the rental roundabout. Let them, but help them with an innovative financial model that will allow them to achieve the great Australian dream. It is tougher with higher house prices. HomeShare is being supported by both sides of politics here in Australia, but its due for a major refresh. That is what we are doing with the Housing Market Entry Program.

Last week when I explained to real estate agents the detail of what the Government has announced and how it will work for their clients, whether they are vendors or buyers, their eyes got as wide as dinner plates. They said to me, 'This is an exciting opportunity. How soon can it start?' The Government will co-invest in a property to help take some of the weight off that higher house price and will also lower the deposit requirement. Subject to the person or the couple being able to service that loan with the bank they will have a lower entry bar into that home.

The opportunity is significant. For those of us who own property, we can all think back to that incredible feeling we had when the real estate agent rang us and said the vendors accepted our offer. It is an incredible moment. I remember it when Julie and I purchased our

first home. We want that great feeling of achievement and self-satisfaction for having worked very hard for something to be the reality for more Tasmanians. It is a great Australian dream. It was spoken of and promoted by Robert Gordon Menzies, probably without doubt Australia's greatest prime minister. In Tasmania people have responded to that over decades. It is the case today that home ownership in Tasmania is higher than the national average.

Tasmanians are responding to this. Who is not responding to aspiration? It is the modern Labor Party, which wants to turn its back on people and say that aspiration does not matter. They want to make it a by-word. They want to ridicule aspiration. They want to criticise the Government for wanting to do better for people, to give them a happier life and a sense of fulfilment and to move well beyond election cycles and budget forward Estimates. Tasmanians are tired of that.

We are excited about the opportunities that sit in front of us. The Government understands that this is not simple. It is not relaxed about anybody who is waiting longer than they ought to for access to safe and sustainable and secure housing. We are completely committed to this task. For people who are waiting and who cannot wait for the houses we are delivering this month, we rely on our department and the services through Housing Connect to help people with their immediate needs right now. Mrs Petrusma followed by Mr Jaensch brought into play whole new services, for example brokerage, so that immediate supports could be provided, and those much-needed extra places, particularly in women's shelters. There were also shelters for men and children. We are making those investments right now.

We are committed to doing better because it is a response to what has always been seen as a desirable outcome, that more people want to call Tasmania home. We are committed to the task. The Premier and I have worked very closely and hard on delivering the new policy platform that we announced last week.

The Premier has just entered the Chamber. I thank him for his commitment to Tasmanians of all ages, people who are doing it tough, or people who are saving because they are in work and they are able to save, and people who are committed to their own future goals but have not quite made it, or they are finding that it is just not possible for them to get their foot on the first rung of the property ladder. We are here to help them. This is what Liberals believe. We believe in the ability of people and the desire of people to want something more for their family. We are there to support them.

I am thrilled about the upcoming changes to the Housing Market Entry Program, commencing in July. We look forward to sharing the detail and the marketing with the Tasmanian community. I hope that we can rely on members of parliament to spread the word through electorate offices and communications. It will help people. Meanwhile, we will deliver the houses we have committed to and look forward to being more useful to those who do not feel that they are in sustainable accommodation right now.

Debate adjourned.

MOTION

Select Committee - Inquiry into Tasmania Basketball Pty Ltd - Motion Negatived

[3.30 p.m.]

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House -

- (1) Appoints a Select Committee, with the power to send for persons, papers and records to inquire into and report upon the Tasmania Government's dealings with Tasmania Basketball Pty Ltd and any other associated entities from 27 August 2020 onwards, including but not limited to -
 - (a) whether the relationship between the former minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Jane Howlett MLC and Tasmania Basketball Pty Ltd's chief executive officer, Mr Simon Brookhouse, constituted a conflict of interest under the ministerial code of conduct;
 - (b) the involvement of the Premier, Honourable Peter Gutwein and his office in managing Ms Howlett's alleged conflict of interest and her departure from the ministry;
 - (c) Ms Howlett's involvement in decisions relating to Tasmanian Government support for Tasmania Basketball Pty Ltd; and
 - (d) any other matters incidental thereto.
- (2) Members to serve on the committee be -
 - (a) three from the Government, nominated by the Leader of the House, including the chairperson;
 - (b) the Deputy Leader of the Opposition;
 - (c) the Leader of the Greens; and
 - (d) the Mover.
- (3) The Committee report by 3 May next.

Mr SPEAKER - Is a vote required?

Ms WHITE - Yes, Mr Speaker.

This Government is not even meeting the low standards of accountability it set for itself in its first six years in office under the former premier, Will Hodgman. When the former Mining minister, Adam Brooks, admitted he had misled the parliament in relation to the use of an email address, the then premier Will Hodgman ordered the Crown Solicitor to investigate. While Adam Brooks later refused to cooperate, the subsequent Integrity Commission investigation found that Adam Brooks had double deleted emails from his business email account because they could have been politically damaging and he kept then premier Mr Hodgman in the dark about it.

This is relevant and I will come to the reason why in a moment. I want to draw members' attention to the report of that Integrity Commission, which is report number 5 of 2018 and the findings contained within. In particular, the findings that relate to the way that then member for Braddon Adam Brooks dealt with the premier. The commission notes:

On the basis of the evidence obtained by the commission, Mr Brooks omitted to accurately inform the premier about the true nature of his ongoing involvement in the operation and management of his relevant business interests while he was a minister. Mr Brooks did not provide the premier on 7 March, 20 May or 10 June 2016 with an accurate update about his ongoing involvement in the operations and management of his relevant business interests. Mr Brooks did not properly advise the premier on 7 March, 20 May or 10 June 2016 that the objective of the protocol that he have no involvement, formal or otherwise, in the management and operation of any of the relevant businesses was not being met and Mr Brooks did not provide the premier with an accurate account of how a filtering system prevented him from accessing or seeing business-related emails of 10 June 2016.

There are further findings that are also relevant, particularly in his dealings with then premier, Mr Hodgman. They are:

Mr Brooks did not advise the premier, and the premier was not aware, that he had deleted emails from that account on 9 and 10 June 2016 that indicated he: had an ongoing involvement in the operation and management of MSS, had exercised influence over the operational decisions of MSS, had not removed himself from the management and operational decisions of MSS, was participating in the decisions concerning the operation of MSS and was provided information in relation to MSS that was not otherwise in the public domain. Mr Brooks did not advise the Crown Solicitor and the Crown Solicitor was not aware that he had deleted emails from that account on 9 and 10 June 2016 that indicated he was participating in the decisions concerning the operation of MSS and was provided information in relation to MSS that was not otherwise in the public domain.

These points are relevant about the character of Adam Brooks because it speaks to the character of the Premier. Despite an Integrity Commission report that was damning in its findings, that found Mr Brooks had lied to the premier, had lied to the Crown Solicitor, Mr Gutwein, now Premier of Tasmania, was happy to endorse him as a member to stand for election last year and to run as a member of his team. That speaks to a lack of integrity.

That is fundamentally one of the reasons why we believe that this parliament should support this motion for a committee to investigate the alleged conflict of interest of a minister under Premier, Peter Gutwein, and the duties that she performed whilst a minister. We have grave concerns that the public interest test was not met and that decisions were not made in the public's interest but instead in the political interest of this Government.

We have seen this pattern of behaviour before. Mr Brooks, of course, is one as I have outlined but I also make the point and remind members about what happened at that point in time and that is the then premier, Will Hodgman, did launch an investigation. When he was the premier, he also launched an investigation when former minister, Sarah Courtney, admitted to being in a close, personal relationship with the head of her department. In fact, he ordered not one but two investigations. In one, the former premier, Mr Hodgman, asked the former Commonwealth director of public prosecutions, Damian Bugg QC, to determine whether there had been a breach of the ministerial code of conduct and in the other, the Department of Premier and Cabinet secretary, Jenny Gale, investigated decisions made during the period where a conflict of interest existed.

There is precedent, as explained by me just now, and also in the actions of the former premier, Will Hodgman, for investigations to occur if directed by the Premier. In that latter investigation, Mr Bugg found that Ms Courtney should have disclosed the relationship on 13 September or soon after and that this was a breach of the ministerial code of conduct. On 13 September 2018, Ms Courtney returned to Tasmania from a state government trade mission to Asia on which she was part of a delegation which included Dr Whittington and Mr Hodgman at the time. She did not advise the premier of that relationship until one month later which was 14 October 2018 and even then you would argue that the standards set by the premier were lax, that there were breaches of the ministerial code of conduct that were allowed to occur. However, at least he launched an investigation.

Under this Premier, standards have changed and they have dropped lower still. There is apparently no allegation that he will investigate because it appears he will believe just about anything anybody tells him. We all remember, unfortunately, that when Adam Brooks was charged with firearms offences and several women came forward to say that he had tricked them with false identification, that this Premier, Peter Gutwein, believed him over them because it is convenient for him to believe what he is told if it suits his political interest. It is a pattern of behaviour.

We had a situation where the Premier was asked on three occasions whether he believed Mr Brooks' versions of events. At this point, you could argue - are we talking about Adam Brooks or Terry Brooks because the behaviour was incredibly deceptive? When the Premier was asked about Mr Brooks' versions of events in relation to catfishing two women through online dating sites and subsequent ongoing relationships, he said he believed Mr Brooks. He even went so far as to accuse a journalist of 'tricking up the photos' and joking that these allegations had occurred because 'Mr Brooks was a good-looking bloke', diminishing the legitimate concerns raised by women in the community. Why? Because it did not suit the Premier to hear the truth. He believed Adam Brooks and did not question. Arguably, the same applies in this situation now, with the former Sport minister, Jane Howlett, where he has believed what has been told to him because it is convenient for his version of the truth.

This is why only an investigation will get to the bottom of whether Mr Gutwein, the Premier, was told the truth because there are questions about whether he was lied to. More

importantly, has the ministerial code of conduct been breached? What are the consequences if a minister does breach the ministerial code of conduct in the Premier, Peter Gutwein's, government? To date, standards have been pretty low.

There does not appear to be any scrutiny; no checks or balances. In fact, there is a culture of 'don't ask, don't tell'. As we now know, courts have found that Adam Brooks did indeed use fake IDs and illegally carried weapons, allegations that the Premier, Peter Gutwein, refused to even investigate.

Today, we stand her for the fifth consecutive sitting day where this Premier and this Government are in chaos and refuse to answer simple questions. Once again, this Premier refuses to investigate what is arguably a most obvious breach of his own ministerial code of conduct. His signature is on the document. Apparently that does not count for very much because this is how ministerial accountability works within the chaotic Liberal government. It is a culture of 'don't ask, don't tell'. Whatever you do, do not tell the boss, because that way he does not have to do anything about it.

Last week, the Premier accused the shadow minister for education, Josh Willie, of lying about Mr Brookhouse visiting the Legislative Council late at night in November last year: another example of the Premier taking on face value what he is told without asking further questions. Does this Premier and this Government think that Josh Willie was the only person in the President's Lounge of the Legislative Council when Simon Brookhouse was there? That is an important question. The Premier should think very carefully about what he does next. His continued refusal to investigate this matter, the alleged conflict of interest of his former Sport minister, and clear it up only makes him complicit in this web of deceit. His own integrity is now on the line.

I take members back to think about the story that has been pitched by this Premier and this Government. It is a story of amazing coincidences. We have the greatest Sport minister in history, as declared by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, being former minister Jane Howlett. Despite this accolade - it is a tragedy in parts - she is dumped from the portfolio of Sport and Recreation. When the Premier is asked about why he has replaced his self-declared best Sport minister in history with a backbencher, the Premier defends the decision by saying that the now Sport minister, Nic Street, has experience because he was an adviser to another minister on sport. That makes him worthy to replace the best Sport minister in history, self-declared by the Premier, because he was once an adviser. Seems a long stretch to me.

The curious part is that this coincidentally occurs just a little over a week after questions reached the Premier's media office asking about a perceived conflict of interest between Ms Howlett and Mr Brookhouse. It is an interesting coincidence. Just about a week after questions start to be raised officially with his own media office about the alleged conflict of interest between his former Sport minister and Mr Brookhouse, Jane Howlett is dumped from her portfolio and replaced with a backbencher who has no ministerial experience whatsoever.

Nonetheless, in this tragedy of coincidences, Ms Howlett brushes herself off, dusts herself off, gets up and goes about her ministerial duties including attending the Launceston Cup on 23 February where she speaks positively about her plans for the Racing portfolio and her determination to continue to support the industry. It is just one day later that we learn that Brad Stansfield, Liberal Party fixer and partner with Font PR, who are consultants for the JackJumpers, joins Ms Howlett for a meeting with the Premier in the Premier's office. We are

told he is there to act as a support person while the minister, who the day before was very enthusiastic about her future in the ministry under Premier Peter Gutwein and his Government, abruptly resigns. That is the story that was told; a story of incredible coincidences.

There is something else about the recent resignation of Jane Howlett that demands further independent scrutiny, not just the Government investigating itself, because integrity in government matters. How can the community trust anything this Government does while this matter remains unresolved? This Government has a stench. There is a culture of cover-up, a lack of integrity in office and questions about the use of public money. There should be an investigation launched. Indeed, this House should support this motion to establish a committee of inquiry so we can review the decisions of the former Sport minister, look at whether conflicts of interest were appropriately managed, and investigate whether there was a breach of the ministerial code of conduct. The Premier refuses to uphold the standards that he set for his minister.

This Government has a pattern of behaviour when it comes to breaches of the ministerial code of conduct. I have spoken already about what happened when Adam Brooks was a minister in the Liberal Government and what happened when Premier Peter Gutwein welcomed him back as a candidate. Terry Brooks: that tells us everything we need to know about the character of this Premier. Past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. It is a reflection on the Premier and the culture he has allowed to fester and thrive in his Government, a 'don't ask, don't tell' culture, political interest before public interest.

You only have to look at other breaches, as I have outlined, with the former minister Sarah Courtney and the delay in declaring that conflict of interest, the upholding of a breach of the ministerial code of conduct, and now the former Sport minister Jane Howlett. This Government has gone out of its way and done everything it can to create distractions and deflect from scrutiny. We saw it first with former minister Sarah Courtney's resignation and the coinciding announcement of the bid for the Commonwealth Games. Did anybody ever believe that was a reality for Tasmania? Certainly not the councils, which were surprised by it. Given that the Commonwealth Games bids are done by councils, you would expect a level of consultation that included them before the Premier opened his mouth about bidding for the Commonwealth Games. That was just a distraction he hoped would deflect attention from the resignation of former minister Sarah Courtney.

When this Government comes under pressure and scrutiny, it tries to divert attention away from the chaos in its Cabinet by making big flashy announcements. There was the \$2 billion announced last week in the state of the state for new unfunded initiatives to deflect attention and scrutiny from the chaos in their Cabinet, and the concerns the community has about the expenditure of public money and whether ministers are acting and behaving consistent with the ministerial code of conduct.

We have seen in this House the Premier turn into 'Shouting Pete', using aggression and bluster to try to deflect from scrutiny of his Government.

I remind members about the time line of the actions that occurred in the position held by Jane Howlett. On 11 February questions were put to the Premier's media office about the alleged conflict of interest between Ms Howlett and Mr Brookhouse. We know that on 16 February the Premier dumped the best Sport minister in history, self-declared by him, Jane

Howlett, from that portfolio. We note that on 25 February in the company of Brad Stansfield, Jane Howlett tendered her resignation in the Premier's office. That is the time line.

I want to go now to details in the ministerial code of conduct because this is fundamentally the reason we are asking these questions. It is about integrity, ensuring that the paper this is written on and signed by the Premier is worth something, and making sure the public can have trust in their Government that when they are making decisions on their behalf, whether it is involving the allocation of taxpayer funds or important policy decisions, they are doing it in their interests and not in their own self-interest or political interest. No minister is exempt from upholding the ministerial code of conduct. It is very clear that any conflict of interest is the responsibility of the minister to manage and they must write to inform the Premier as soon as possible after becoming aware of the conflict.

I will read directly from it, because it seems some of the ministers in Premier Gutwein's Cabinet need reminding of their obligations:

Ministers are expected to behave according to the highest ethical standards in the performance of their duties as they hold a position of trust, and have a great deal of discretionary power which can have a significant impact on the citizens of Tasmania.

This also includes the requirement that any Cabinet minister, if they observe what they think could be a breach of the code, to let the Premier know. It says quite clearly:

Recognising the convention of collective responsibility for Government decisions, Ministers are obliged to report any Code non-compliance by themselves or by another Minister to the Premier, or in the case of the Premier, to Cabinet.

This is important because it means that any minister in your Government, Premier - through you, Mr Speaker - who observed behaviour that they considered could constitute a breach of the ministerial code of conduct, particularly in relation to conflicts of interest, has an obligation under the code, signed by you, to report that to make sure that under the convention of collective responsibility for government decisions that they too are upholding the code. I am curious to know whether the code has been upheld, not just by the former minister but by all ministers sitting in Peter Gutwein's Cabinet.

I will go on to read from the code, in particular around the conflicts of interest component:

Any material conflict between a Member's private interest and his or her official duties which arises must be resolved promptly in favour of the public interest.

So as to protect and uphold the public interest, Ministers must take reasonable steps to avoid, resolve or disclose any material conflict of interest, financial or non-financial, that arises, or is likely to arise, between their personal interests and their official duties.

Ministers must declare any such conflict of interest in writing to the Premier as soon possible after becoming aware of the conflict.

Mr Speaker, I make the point that yesterday we asked questions of the Premier about whether any conflicts of interest had been recorded by him during the deliberations of Cabinet prior or during. We do not need to understand what they are. We want to understand if this process is followed. We need to understand whether this is worth the paper it is written on. Yesterday the Premier could not say yesterday whether any conflicts of interest had been declared and I found that interesting. I would have thought, without breaching Cabinet confidentiality, he could make it plain that when it has been necessary and appropriate, conflicts have been declared. He can do the same today, as I see him in the Chamber and suspect that he will be contributing on this debate, to ensure that he makes it clear to Tasmanians that his ministers are acting in the favour of the public interest at all times.

I also note that the code provides an example for the threshold for disclosure and gives the example that a minister proposing to reduce boat licence fees should declare a conflict of interest if they also happen to own a boat. It provides a really simple example that sets a threshold at a point that I would argue would require ministers to be incredibly transparent about whether they had a conflict of interest or not, to the point that they could disclose if they had a boat if they were setting boat licence fees.

It goes on to say that in that example they would not have to exclude themselves from the decision-making process but they would need to declare the conflict of interest. My question is whether, under the leadership of this Premier, those standards are being met.

It is only an independent inquiry, a committee of this parliament. If the Premier is going to refuse to allow for a similar investigation to occur, as has happened under previous premiers and the standards they upheld, we must look at these matters in detail.

Further in the code it provides some guidance around conflicts of interest. It says:

A Minister should ask him or herself what an ordinary reasonable person would do or think in the same or similar circumstances. A material interest may arise if, as a result of a Minister's action or decision, the Minister, a close relative or a dependent person will or is likely to suffer a detriment or receive a benefit.

2.1.4 goes on to say:

A conflict of interest does not only encompass actual or direct conflicts of interest between a Minister's official duty and private interests. A potential or perceived conflict of interest may also constitute a material conflict of interest.

'Potential or perceived' - I would argue that is very relevant in this instance because the evidence that we have seen and the information that we have suggests that there was a potential or perceived conflict of interest. How did the Premier manage that if it was disclosed and how can we and the community have confidence that decisions taken by the minister were done in a way that managed that appropriately? We have seen no evidence presented by this Government to show how that was done and hence we are in this situation where we are moving for a committee of inquiry.

I will go on to talk to further elements of the code where it talks about the role of Cabinet:

A Minister who has a material interest in a matter to be discussed in Cabinet must declare the interest to the Premier (or other Minister who is presiding at the meeting) at the commencement of the meeting.

The Premier, possibly after discussion with other members of the Cabinet, may agree that the Minister has a material conflict of interest in the matter.

If it is determined that the Minister has a material conflict of interest in the matter, he or she will not be able to take part in the discussion or decision-making on that matter.

The Minister may be asked to absent him or herself from Cabinet for the purposes of discussing whether there is a material conflict of interest in relation to that matter and the matter itself.

The fact of any declaration of interest, a determination that it is material and any absence from the Cabinet discussion on a matter is to be recorded in any resulting Cabinet Decision about that matter.

Again, this goes to the point of process and our concerns about whether they have been followed.

I will go now to the Budget papers because in the 2021 Budget the capital investment program identified that, under the Minister for Sport and Recreation - not the Premier or the Treasurer - sits the Derwent Entertainment Centre and multisports facility. At this point in time the estimated total project costs were \$68.5 million. That is a lot of taxpayer funding to be administered under this particular portfolio of Sport and Recreation, specifically for the Derwent Entertainment Centre and the multisports facility. Those figures are in the 2020-21 Budget.

In the 2021-22 Budget we see in the capital investment program again under this Minister for Sport and Recreation line item, that the Derwent Entertainment Centre and multi-sports facility has now increased to \$83.5 million. The estimated project cost just a year prior was \$68.5 million and in the 2021-22 Budget it is \$83.5 million, a significant increase, sitting under the responsibility of the minister of Sport and Recreation, clearly outlined in the budget papers. I also point back to the Public Works Committee who in evidence provided to them were informed very clearly that the Government has committed funding capped at \$41 million towards the estimated cost of \$50.6 million of what is now termed category 1 project works. It does say that:

The development agreement between the Crown and LK Development provides that any project costs with the exception of latent conditions in the building or below ground over the Tasmanian Government's commitment of \$41 million will be borne by LKDT.

We asked questions about that and the Premier provided an answer that the increase in costs and the increase in contribution from the state Government is because of the increase in materials. That may very well be true but it does not explain why this sits under the Minister for Sport and Recreation's portfolio in the Budget papers. If this allocation of additional

funding went to Cabinet, was a conflict of interest declared? I would argue the Budget goes to Cabinet so you would hope that this matter was dealt with there.

The Premier might try to claim that it was just him dealing with the proponents about any funding allocation or any variations to funding but the facts are that the Budget papers clearly demonstrate that the responsibility for the management of that fund sits with the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

This is why a committee is necessary because it will have the powers and the ability to look at this in further detail and seek advice from those departments about how the funding arrangement was managed, and how any conflicts of interest were managed. We are talking about public money here but, more critically than that, I would argue we are talking about the integrity of this Government, the way that it manages conflicts of interest perceived, potential or actual. They are all captured under the ministerial code of conduct.

There is a cloud hanging over the head of the Government and the conduct of the former Sport minister and the only way for that to be cleared up is for an inquiry to be given the scope to investigate, to call for evidence, to hear from witnesses. If the Government has nothing to hide then they should agree to this inquiry. They should agree to this motion. If the Government has nothing to hide then there should be no problem whatsoever. We have proposed that this committee will report by 3 May. It will be a quick committee. We propose that it does its work in a way that does not take up members' time but it gets to the bottom of this issue and if the Government has nothing to hide then they should support this motion.

The membership of the committee allows for the Government to have the numbers with their chair having the casting vote. There is no reason why you would not support this motion given you have the power to control the committee with the casting vote being held by the chair.

The purpose of the inquiry, and this is the key point, is to ensure that integrity in government decisions and government decision-making is upheld. I expect that every person in this place can agree this is vital. It is vital for trust in government. Without integrity, without transparency of decision-making, then the community will rightly question every decision this Government makes.

Unfortunately for this Premier, Peter Gutwein, there is a pattern of behaviour here demonstrated through his 'don't ask, don't tell' culture. We saw it most clearly with Adam Brooks. We are seeing it again now. The community deserves better. Let us clear this matter up. Let us send it to an inquiry. Let us make sure that we restore integrity to government and decisions made on behalf of Tasmanians.

[4.05 p.m.]

Mr GUTWEIN (Bass - Premier) - Mr Speaker, we will not support the motion before us. I have heard a few things in this place over time. When members stand up and take their time to read through their motions to waste time it is usually because they do not have enough of an argument to fill the remainder of the time available. Even in this instance I do not think the Leader of the Opposition used all her time in respect to this motion.

Much of the content the Leader of the Opposition provided in her contribution has largely already been said, apart from the fact that she went back over the circumstances relating to

Mr Brooks and Ms Courtney. In those investigations it was clear the premier of the day had good cause for those investigations.

In this case, no proof has been provided of a conflict of interest. In fact, when these matters regarding Ms Howlett were first raised with me via my office I spoke to her on a number of occasions, as I have indicated to the parliament. I put these rumours and allegations to her and she categorically said there was no truth to them. I have been quite clear in respect to that.

You went on in the matters relating to Ms Courtney and the investigation of Mr Brooks and other matters. Again, you have attempted to not only smear Ms Howlett's character but also mine.

The Labor Party would do well to remember that they had a deputy premier on this side of the House, not once but twice, who was taken to the Supreme Court and twice was found not innocent. Then he became the leader of the opposition, if memory serves me correctly. In attempting to smear me, your history and the Labor Party's history is one that you should not be proud of. Secondly, in terms of your own position regarding the member who now sits as an independent member for Franklin, you still have questions to answer about what you knew when you voted for Mr O'Byrne to take on the leadership of the Labor Party. Likewise, every member on that side has questions to answer about what you knew about that complaint which was before you.

What has galled me most about the Leader of the Opposition's contribution was that she made the point on a number of occasions that there were a number of coincidences here. One significant fact that she did not raise regarding Ms Howlett's resignation for personal and family reasons was the untimely and unfortunate death of her brother. Is that a coincidence? Was that another amazing coincidence as you have tried to construct your arguments here?

The weaponising of privilege that has gone on here in the way the Leader of the Opposition and disgracefully, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, have weighed in to this with no regard for the human being at the other end who has recently lost her brother, has resigned for personal and family reasons, and is grieving. The scant regard for the family that sits with her and for her parents: it staggers me the brutal way that you have waded in to this. It beggars belief. I have never seen anything like it to be frank. Dr Broad can moan and carry on behind his mask, but what has occurred here has been disgraceful. There has been no recognition whatsoever of the circumstances Ms Howlett found herself in.

She was sworn in on that day at Government House within a handful of hours of the death of her brother. As I have said, that is something that I would never allow a minister or member of this side of the House to go through again. When I look back, it was a significant mistake on my behalf but, on that day, Ms Howlett said she felt comfortable and wanted to continue with the swearing-in at Government House. In hindsight it was an extraordinarily difficult time for her.

The other point that I make is that the JackJumpers have been caught in your fire and your unbridled desire to damage Ms Howlett. They have been drawn fairly and squarely into this, to the point where I can only presume that this full frontal attack on them has been part of your desire to denigrate anything that this Government is trying to do. Mr Kestelman was forced to come into the debate this week, to be clear that no conflict of interest existed between

the organisation or the former Sport minister. I find it extraordinary. It is something that is so positive in the community, in what that franchise is doing, as members in this place understand. It is engaging kids across the community; it is putting Tasmania on the national stage. Yet, you are quite prepared to trash its brand on the way through. I find that outrageous. To be frank, it is a real shame that in your desire to make political points, you would trash their brand on the way through. I think Mr Kestelman, in his entry into the debate, felt that he had no other option than to engage. That you forced that to occur does not stand the state in good stead. I do not think it stands the JackJumpers in good stead.

I remind the Leader of the Opposition that you and the shadow treasurer have given scant regard to the fact that we own the MyState Bank Arena; we bought Wilkinson's Point from the Glenorchy City Council. We own the asset. The funding that has gone into that arena, which is around \$65 million, plus the purchase of the land, is money that has been invested on behalf of the Tasmanian taxpayer. It is not a \$100 million gift to the JackJumpers, as has been suggested from that side. The only reason I can think that you would falsely make those claims is because you want to damage the JackJumpers franchise on the way through as you were attempting to inflict some form of political damage on me. You should stand ashamed for that; you knew full well. If the shadow treasurer did not know that, then he should not be the shadow treasurer.

Regarding the major terms that were agreed between us and the Jack Jumpers, they were agreed between me and Mr Kestelman well before there was a franchise that was put in place or a sponsorship agreement. That was well before Mr Brookhouse was even appointed. Again, it is a failure of the Opposition to understand that or, in fact, maybe they did understand that, but just did not care. They just wanted to damage Ms Howlett; they wanted to run a political argument. It suited their aims and so, who cares, who or what on the way through they hurt, damage or inflict pain upon? Unfortunately, the JackJumpers has borne the brunt to some extent of the Leader of the Opposition's desire to wade into this.

I have been clear with this parliament about what occurred when I first became aware of the allegation via the media inquiry. I put that matter to Ms Howlett, as I have said and repeated it to this House. She categorically said that there was no truth to those rumours. Regarding Ms Howlett's resignation, that was very clear, in terms of my explanation to this House, that was for personal and family reasons. Again, that is something you have walked all over in terms of your regard for her as human being and the circumstances that she found herself in.

Mr Ellis - Shame.

Mr GUTWEIN - It is a shame, Mr Ellis. It is a disgrace to be frank. I have never seen anybody in this place attacked so viciously, to have had their reputation attacked based on smear and innuendo and I have never witnessed privilege be used as such a weapon as it has been over the last period.

I want to be clear: in terms of other matters that the Leader of the Opposition raised, whilst there is no conflict, and that has been confirmed by both Ms Howlett and the JackJumpers, we follow to the letter but I am not going to speak, as I have said in answer to questions, about what occurs within Cabinet. That is not right, nor is it appropriate to do so. We follow the ministerial code. We will not be supporting the motion that is before us.

The Leader of the Opposition has not made her case. As I have said in this place, if you have proof, provide it. You have attempted to continue with your persecution of Ms Howlett. You even extended yourself to the point where you are making up mythical visitors to parliament last week, which was just disgraceful. I do not know who provided you with that advice, but you were very clear on the *Hansard* that Mr Brookhouse was supposedly here last Wednesday, when quite obviously he was not - a matter that has been put on the public record by the JackJumpers themselves. Again, it made no difference to you. You just waded on with it. The assertion that you made that Mr Brookhouse would hang around to 11 o'clock at night - quite clearly from those texts, the reason he was here was to see Mr Willie.

Dr Broad - Are you sure about that?

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr GUTWEIN - If you have any proof, put it up. Right through this, they have not been prepared to provide any proof. I have been clear in this House that upon being made aware of these rumours, I put them to Ms Howlett. Ms Howlett categorically denied them. Ms Howlett's resignation was for personal and family reasons. Under the circumstances, while unfortunate, it was perfectly reasonable on her behalf in light of the circumstances that she found herself in.

This side of the House will not be supporting this motion. Labor has not made a case for support. After what has gone on over the last week in this place, Labor should hang its head in shame. Labor members have used smear, innuendo, they have focused on rumour and they have attempted to create rumour. They have weaponised privilege and in doing so they have attacked an individual who was grieving the loss of her brother. They should be ashamed of themselves.

[4.21 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, the Greens will always support greater transparency, particularly when there is a question about the allocation of public funds. We are prepared to support this motion but there are a few things I want to say on the way through.

I have been around politics for long enough to understand that this is not driven by the Labor Opposition's deep and abiding commitment to the proper administration of public funding. This is because Labor has smelled blood and has come back into parliament in the first week, after a summer which saw COVID-19 transmission rampant in the community and where, at that stage, I think 12 people have lost their lives to COVID-19, and decided to go on this as an issue because the politics was easy for them.

When they ask these questions, the media's ears prick up. This topic is quite sensational in its way - an alleged affair between a minister of the Crown and the CEO of one of our beloved sporting teams and whether that alleged affair led to an improper allocation of funding that benefited the JackJumpers.

I do not see this as a particularly noble gesture on the Labor Opposition's part. I can almost imagine the conversation in their morning parliamentary Labor Party meeting when they were talking about the tactics for the week. The goal was to sling enough mud hoping it would stick. No-one comes out of this looking particularly shiny.

We have in this parliament a regrettable recent history, certainly since 2014 of the party of Government, the Liberal Party, using question time as an opportunity for self-promotion and obfuscation. We have a culture that comes straight from the top of it being okay to be untruthful in here, or to conceal truth by omission.

Since 2014 I have watched minister after minister and two premiers get up in this place in question time and not be honest with the people of Tasmania. We had a classic example of it in here this morning, following a question from the member for Franklin, Mr O'Byrne, to the Minister for Resources. It was a straight question. The minister was not going anywhere near the answer because he knows he does not have to, because there is no expectation of honesty and transparency on the part of Government. We see it all the time. We have seen it on big issues that matter to the people of Tasmania, like the casino pokies tax rate. The Premier and his Finance minister all through the last premature state election campaign pretended it had been resolved, pretended it was a non-issue on multiple occasions. In the media, and therefore speaking to the people of Tasmania, they pretended that there is nothing to see regarding the tax rate that had been negotiated with the Federal Group.

The Greens asked a question about it before the election. We were told there is nothing to see. It is implied that we are conspiracy theorists and tin foil hat wearers, but as it transpired a deal had been struck with Federal Group, which was given one of the lowest giveaway casino pokies tax rates in the country, comparable only with a casino in far north Queensland, in Townsville.

It was a lie to say the matter had been dealt with. It had not been dealt with. There had been no honesty. It was a live question that had significant financial consequences for the state's Budget. Tasmanians were gaslit. They were told by their state's leader and a minister of the Crown that this is not an issue, there is nothing to see here, it has all been dealt with in 2018 and it had not been.

It is the same culture of being loose with the truth, of not providing information openly and transparently. It is the same culture that allows the Premier on the Greens' question to refuse to table Public Health's advice that says it is apparently safe to remove masks.

I believe it was Ms White who said, 'If you have nothing to hide, what is the problem?' Why would you not be open with the people of Tasmania about a decision which has significant consequences for them and the people they love? It has significant consequences for the health and safety of elderly people, the disabled, immunocompromised, cancer patients, people who are chronically ill.

It undermines public trust in Government. Regrettably, we are all smeared. It undermines public trust in politicians when people get the sense that they are being lied to or being kept in the dark, 'that the Government holds all the cards', as Mr Killick said in his column last week and the people of Tasmania are not allowed to see them.

Good governments are really open and honest. Day after day in question time it is like living in an alternative reality. The Government is telling the people of Tasmania that everything in Tasmania right now is absolutely terrific. It tells me that this Government is out of touch or not reading those letters and emails from people who have been on the elective surgery waiting list for three years, or who are facing a rent hike of \$100 a week on a place they already pay \$450 a week for and they know that they cannot afford it. It is a layer of

propaganda that we are subject to all the time. With that propaganda we have cultural dishonesty.

Getting back to the topic at hand, the Premier said a moment ago, 'I have been clear about this with parliament. I have been clear with this parliament about this issue'. How would we know? You just cannot know because there is such a history here of falsehood. We had a minister of the Crown before the last election deny what we had in black and white in a Cabinet minute, was the truth. This Government was going to weaken tenancy protections. We had hold of a Cabinet minute that made it really clear that a minister of the Crown felt comfortable stepping up to the lectern and not telling the truth.

It has become normalised that you are allowed to be dishonest in this Government. In fact, it is encouraged because the default is secrecy. How can we know whether there is any substance here? How can we be sure that public funds have been administered with propriety and appropriately? We cannot. That is why having a committee inquiry process could help to find some truth here.

Dr Woodruff and I are very mindful of the fact we are talking about peoples' lives here and people who are not able to defend themselves. I am very mindful of Ms Howlett's grief. I am very mindful of Ms Howlett's family. We do have to be very careful when we raise these issues in here or outside.

I might say no-one had that concern for me when my relationship with Mr McKim was made public on the front page of *The Examiner* before I had a chance to really talk to my children about it. No-one thought about my kids then but, we are in politics and you have to be hard on the outside and hopefully soft enough on the inside to retain your decency and compassion.

I am worried about the impact of this ongoing debate on Ms Howlett's family particularly. I do not know the circumstances of the other person, Mr Brookhouse. I do not know his circumstances at all but I have met Jane's beautiful daughter and I like Jane. I like Ms Howlett, I think she is a good person.

Somewhat reluctantly, we will support this motion to establish an inquiry for two reasons. One, because transparency is healthy, and two, because we are talking here about millions of dollars in public funding. There is a question here that has not been resolved. I do not understand why the Premier has not just come in here and tabled the financial documents that backup his assertion that there was no conflict of interest here. I do not understand why he would not just try to make it go away by putting those documents on the table.

The problem that the Premier has here is a history of being less than honest, of deceit by concealment, of never upholding, apparently, the ministerial code of conduct. There never seem to be consequences with these people. It is the same with Mr Morrison at the federal level. You have out and out corruption happening at the federal level ever since Mr Morrison became Prime Minister. Angus Taylor, Michaelia Cash, Bridget McKenzie - hugely immoral, questionable conduct by ministers of the Crown and a prime minister who never upholds any set of standards. Anything goes. I do commend to members here Crikey's compendium of Scott Morrison's lies. This is from a prime minister who has a huge problem with the truth. I do not know if it is a disorder of some sort. Scott Morrison is the least honest prime minister we have ever had. It seems to be something to do with the conservative brain, because Boris

Johnson is another profligate liar. No standards, no consequences, a lying, cheating charlatan. What is it about conservatives that makes it so easy for them not to be honest?

I do not know how people who are untruthful about important things justify that internally. We are elected to this place to do the right thing by the people of Tasmania. There is a huge amount of trust placed on our shoulders. How do you get up in this place in these privileged positions and not be truthful? It baffles me. It troubles me but we have seen it over and over again, in the 'Terry' Brooks affair: the fact that you can have a minister of the Crown, when he was minister for mining who could lie three times at the Estimates table and there were no consequences there for him that he did not initiate. He did not have then-premier saying, 'Busted: being untruthful in a Westminster parliament, off you go'. That is not the way it happened.

Then you get the current Premier wooing Mr Brooks back to run as a Liberal candidate in Braddon and standing by him when there was clear, irrefutable evidence of Mr Brooks lying to women about who he was. Instead of doing the right thing and first of all not inviting Mr Brooks back and when it became clear that the guy was very shonky, saying, 'We are no longer interested in having you as a candidate on our ticket in Braddon' we had this Premier accuse journalist Emily Baker of 'tricking up' video. That is not the sign of someone who is trustworthy. It is not.

One of the obvious outstanding questions here, given the Premier has said he accepted at face value Ms Howlett's denial of the alleged relationship, is why was the Sport and Recreation portfolio taken away from Ms Howlett who clearly loved it? If the Premier did not know this was a potential political hot potato then why did he not leave Sport and Recreation with Ms Howlett, if there was no problem, nothing to see here? Anyway, at that point, apparently, he had not heard the rumours. I think there are questions here.

Obviously, this motion is not going to get up. It will be negated by a casting vote from you, Mr Speaker. I note Ms Johnston is not here today, and I am unsure what happens to pairs in that situation but you would not call it a ringing endorsement over this motion, a ringing endorsement of the version of events that we have been told in the parliament. I do wish what we were debating now in the Opposition's private members' time was the establishment of a parliamentary committee to examine the Government's response to COVID-19 and particularly to Omicron. That would be a matter of much greater interest and impact on the lives of Tasmanians. Many Tasmanians have many questions but we are not; we are debating this.

We will reluctantly support it but I encourage the Opposition, once this motion is dealt with, to start refocusing on some of the issues that Tasmanians are really worried about.

[4.41 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Minister for Finance) - Mr Speaker, it is a poor show from the Labor Party, a very weak attempt by the Leader of the Opposition to dust herself off from a disastrous fortnight in parliament and to try to prosecute an inquiry that she has not been able to explain the need for. It is not for the Government to explain that something is not true when Ms White has been unable to come forward with a scrap of evidence for her appalling accusations.

A member interjecting.

Mr FERGUSON - For the member who is interjecting, timid as it is, who made the strongest accusation against Mr Brookhouse and Ms Howlett, Rebecca White was quite strategic in sending out her hapless deputy to make the personal affair allegation. It was cowardly.

Ms WHITE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I ask you to remind members to use appropriate titles in this place. I thought we had agreed that we are going to refer to members as the standing orders ask us to.

Mr SPEAKER - I uphold that point.

Mr FERGUSON - You got me. The Leader of the Opposition sent out her hapless deputy to ask that appalling question that Ms White, quite understandably, was not prepared to ask herself. Not prepared to throw that appalling BS pile of mud across the Chamber, she sends out Ms Dow to do it. I thought that was regrettable. I thought that would be beneath Ms Dow to do that. She ought to have said, 'No, I don't think that's right. I don't think I should do that, even if the parliamentary Labor Party wants me to ask that question. It is provocative and it got the headline that you wanted.' It had not been in the press before you asked that question.

I do not mind being very clear about my own knowledge of these rumours. I feel very strongly about this as my colleagues know, and as other people in this Chamber know. I feel very strongly about this because many of us are subject to rumours. It is daily grist for the mill in politics.

The first I heard of any of a rumour of a 'close, personal relationship' between the former minister, Ms Howlett and Mr Brookhouse, was on that Friday when David Killick at the *Mercury* wrote that story online. I saw it appear the day or two after the reshuffle announcement. I heard Ms White last week making pointing gestures at me and other members of the front bench over here, 'We know you all knew.' Knew what? To know something is very different from hearing a rumour. Rumours get passed about all the time, including about you lot and what you get up to, daytime and night-time.

I will be very clear. I hear a lot of rumours about all sorts of things. I am certain most are not true at all but I did not even hear a rumour of such a relationship until I saw it in the *Mercury* online on that Friday afternoon. It must have been two Fridays ago.

I am very angry about this because I have been hanging around politics for 20 years and I have seen a lot of abuse of parliamentary privilege. I believe I have not been guilty of abusing parliamentary privilege but that is for others to judge. I have seen a lot of abuse of parliamentary privilege. I have not seen two members of the community, one in parliament and one not in parliament, basically being written up in parliament as having a sexual affair outside of their respective marriages or other relationships in circumstances where those two people have made it very clear that they are not happy with what is being said because it is not true. I have not seen it.

I feel very strongly about it. Sometimes rumors do turn out to be true, we all know that. Sometimes even rumors that are denied turn out to be true. Such is human frailty. Sometimes people cannot bring themselves to be honest and they will deny things that are true. It comes out later; it always does.

We are in no position to be claiming that something is occurring when not one member of this House has a scrap of evidence to the contrary. You do not. The Deputy Leader who made the allegation in this House: you had no knowledge. You have no evidence. The Leader of the Opposition has no evidence; it has been so clear.

We have seen many times in this House, where a cleverer Leader of the Opposition, more likely a Greens leader, takes us on a journey of opening up a line of questioning. They know where they want to get to because they have got something. They might have a document. They might know something about a transit centre, or they might know something about a shredded bit of paper that a Labor deputy premier shredded and lied about and so the narrative unrolls. It starts out with an innocent, open question. When the minister of the day answers it in a particular way, we go to a slightly deeper level. Eventually, we get to the point where maybe there is a case that can be made out and the minister may or may not be found to be wanting.

That has not happened. What we have was a stab-in-the-eye question, describing in detail a personal sexual relationship being alleged between two people, who are now firmly on the record as of today saying that is not the truth, going much further than the print media had been prepared to go, probably for good reason of legal defamation. You cannot print stuff that is not true. When it is harmful to a person's reputation, there are remedies.

What Ms Dow and the filthy Labor Party did was give voice to the full accusation, in all of its graphic language of an affair, which gives the print media the right to report what happened in parliament. Then the damage is nonetheless done with no remedy available to those people who are the subject of that accusation.

I personally would not want to be defamed in that way. I would not want my marriage to be discussed and thought of in public. My relationship with my beautiful, loving wife of 27 years to whom I have been faithful, I would not want people thinking otherwise because this lot over there bring my personal arrangements into the public domain and make a smear of a lie.

Ms Butler - Why is that relevant?

Mr FERGUSON - It is highly relevant because you are defaming people in this House in coward's castle. You have had not a scrap of evidence. Not a scrap of evidence has been produced. We saw the spectacle of Ms White on the news last night. 'Oh, and I've got that.'

Ms Butler who has made zero contribution to this House since she entered it, dares to interject. If she has something to say, get up and say it. This is a serious matter. I do not appreciate the member making such juvenile interjections on a serious matter.

Ms BUTLER - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I take offence to that. I ask the member to please withdraw his casting aspersions upon my character.

Mr FERGUSON - You should be offended. No, I will not be withdrawing. Go away.

Ms BUTLER - I ask for a ruling.

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Speaker, I make the point, I will not be withdrawing.

Mr SPEAKER - What offence did you take? I did not hear any offensive comment.

Ms BUTLER - He was casting aspersions on my character and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER - Minister, if the member feels aggrieved, then I will ask you to withdraw.

Mr FERGUSON - The member is rising because I accused her of making zero contribution -

Ms Finlay - Are you withdrawing? You have been asked by the Speaker to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - I do not believe it is appropriate to withdraw what is a valid debate.

Ms FINLAY - You have been asked by the Speaker to withdraw. Mr Speaker, I am taking offence from the member and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER - Again, withdrawal should be -

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Speaker, if you ask me to withdraw, I will withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER - A member has claimed offence and so -

Mr FERGUSON - Are you asking me to withdraw, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER - I am asking you to withdraw, the same as I would -

Mr FERGUSON - I withdraw it, Mr Speaker. I am surprised that a member could not take that, given what they have said about others who cannot even defend themselves. For the Labor Party to have done this and then last night on the television news we had the spectacle of Ms White saying, 'This could all be laid to rest with an independent investigation'. How pathetic that the Leader of the Opposition, who is the accuser of Ms Howlett and Mr Brookhouse, is not able to sustain that accusation of an affair, of a conflict of interest because Ms White has relied on rumour and innuendo; I suspect has, in fact, been responsible for the rumour and innuendo, has not been able to provide any evidence for what she has brought to this House. Her questions since last Tuesday to yesterday have been more and more dilute. More and more exploratory. More and more desperate, trying to find something when there is nothing there to be found.

What has occurred is, having now damaged the reputation of these people, without a doubt in my mind harmed the sense of wellbeing of children in those families, Ms White wants somebody else to tell us whether there is a case to be found. If that is now the test for when an independent investigation ought to take place, then there will be an independent investigation every day of the week, every day somebody brings a rumour into this House. This House should take a stand against that kind of gutter behaviour from the Labor Party.

Through you, Mr Speaker, I say to the Greens, how could you reward the Labor Party on this motion by saying you would vote for it based on that threshold test? An allegation has

been made by Ms White, an accusation has been made by Ms Dow. I see no witness evidence, I see no photographic evidence, I see very suspect claims about text messages from the Opposition. I am not aware of any admission that has been made by the parties. Therefore, Ms White and Ms Dow are entirely on their own. I say again, others can speak for themselves if they want, but the first I heard of such rumours was when the rumours were published. So you do an independent investigation when the Labor Party brings an unfounded rumour to this House? Despite wasting all their time on this matter and finally changing subject this morning in question time on the second Wednesday, they have the temerity to bring this motion before the House, calling for an independent investigation.

It gets worse because Ms White, who has no policies, no alternative for the people of Tasmania, no vision for the future, at the weekend was saying, 'We are going to continue to scrutinise the Government over this allegation and if we do not get our way then we will refer it to the Integrity Commission'. Ms White has no power to direct the Integrity Commission to do anything because the Integrity Commission does not take instructions from Ms White, nor I, nor any member of this House. The Integrity Commission has begged politicians of Tasmania to stop dropping their name into rumour and innuendo and claims. If complaints do need to be made to the IC, you make them privately and properly because if there is a problem that ought to be uncovered and investigated, they want to be able to do so properly. If complaints need to be made to the IC, you make them privately and properly. If there is a problem that ought to be uncovered and investigated they want to do so properly. The Integrity Commission chief commissioner has consistently called on politicians to stop their public utterances around complaints being made.

Ms White could make a complaint to the Integrity Commission. It surprises me that she would wait until the end of the week to do so if she has not already done so. If Ms White really believed that there was a conflict of interest between Ms Howlett and the JackJumpers, why would she not have already made the complaint and provided them with her evidence? I suspect she has no evidence. We know Ms White will make a complaint. You could use the phrase 'we saw you coming'. When Ms White does that, I am certain the IC will assess the complaint and come to its own mind about what to do with that complaint. It begs the question why Ms White would say in the media on the weekend that she will do it at the end of the week if she does not get a way in the House. It is a further question for Ms White to answer.

If Ms White was right about this smear, if there was truth to these claims and she was able to back it up, she would have a defence at law if there was a defamation case against her. Ms White does not have the courage of her convictions to go outside this coward's castle of hers and repeat those accusations against a female MP, Ms Howlett, and a member of the public, Mr Brookhouse.

As far as I am concerned, that is a pretty good summing up of Ms White's weakness and her accusation.

Ms O'Connor - Even if you do say so yourself.

Mr FERGUSON - It surprises me that Ms O'Connor will lower herself to support the motion based on that appalling lack of evidence that I would have thought *prima facie* you would expect to see.

Ms O'Connor - We are a bit old-fashioned about transparency.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - That is for you to explain to the public. We had a very open and shut case on misleading the House last week. The rules around misleading the House do not apply just to ministers. They apply to every member of this House. Opposition MPs seem to lose track of this. You are not allowed to lie in here.

We do all make mistakes. I have, and I am always open about it. If I have said something that is incorrect, I say so when I become aware of it. I have been called on to do so. I can think of a good example where I said a consultancy had not been issued on a particular project in the Department of State Growth. It turned out there had been one. Labor called on me to correct the record and I did.

Ms White said that Mr Brookhouse was seen in this building last Wednesday. Nobody can say they saw him, only Ms White. She is wrong. She got it wrong. Or did she lie? We called on her. That is the question I ask. We called on her to correct the record.

Mr SPEAKER - Minister, the word 'liar' has been bandied around today. You used it again. It should not be used. Ms O'Connor was very careful in her contribution and kept it to a minimum. You cannot accuse a member of lying.

Mr FERGUSON - I would like to withdraw the question that I posed.

Ms O'CONNOR - Can I get some clarity from you, Mr Speaker? My understanding is you do not call someone a liar, but to say something is a lie is acceptable? That is what I tried to do.

Mr SPEAKER - That is where you have to be cautious.

Mr FERGUSON - I want to wrap up on this point. Ms White has not corrected the record to this moment. She needs to do that. She said the wrong thing in the House. Whether she meant it or not, it is not accurate and has been denied by all. Ms White ought to correct this record. While she does not, it is a further stain on her character and the way she has conducted this appalling witch hunt against Ms Howlett who is grieving the death of a loved brother, and has been at pains to deny the allegation of a personal relationship and the affair that you scurrilously brought into this place.

Time expired.

Mr SPEAKER - The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided -

AYES 10

Dr Broad
Ms Butler (Teller)
Ms Dow
Ms Finlay
Ms Haddad

NOES 11

Mrs Alexander
Ms Archer
Mr Barnett
Mr Ellis
Mr Ferguson

Mr O'Byrne
Ms O'Byrne
Ms O'Connor
Ms White
Dr Woodruff

Mr Gutwein
Mr Jaensch
Ms Ogilvie
Mrs Petrusma
Mr Rockliff
Mr Tucker (Teller)

PAIRS

Mr Winter

Mr Street

Motion negatived.

MOTION

COVID-19 - Mask Mandates - Motion Negatived

[5.04 p.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House -

- (1) Notes that on the 4 March 2022, the Premier Hon. Peter Gutwein MP, announced a phase out of the mandatory mask-wearing public health order.
- (2) Acknowledges:
 - (a) this decision is likely to increase community transmission of COVID-19 and expose vulnerable Tasmanians to higher risk; and
 - (b) COVID-19 protections, and their removal, are a significant matter of public interest.
- (3) Calls on the Gutwein Government to table the unredacted advice provided by Public Health that underpinned the Premier's decision to remove mask protections.

Mr SPEAKER - Is a vote required?

Dr WOODRUFF - Yes. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We have moved this motion today because of our deep and abiding concern and we are reflecting the views of so many Tasmanians at the complete U-turn in public health policy of this Liberal Government in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After 15 December when the borders opened, Ms O'Connor, the Leader of the Greens and I spent the whole summer in constant communication with many Tasmanians: intelligent,

concerned, caring, community-minded people who looked at the evidence, who looked at the protections that were in place, who looked at the impact of the borders opening and who were incredibly outraged, fearful, disbelieving, at the complete about-face of the Premier's COVID-19 strategy: the change from putting Tasmanian's health and safety first throughout the first two years of the pandemic to adopting the federal Liberal Party's, Scott Morrison's, 'let it rip' approach, where COVID-19 has entered our community.

What has happened? How is it going? Before the borders opened on 15 December we had 240 cases of COVID-19 that had been recorded in two years in Tasmania, and 13 deaths. Today, the latest information is that we have had 53 390 Tasmanians who have been infected with COVID-19. Today's figures were for 1109 most recent daily cases. The day before that was 1051. Across the last week we have had numbers in the high 800s to 900s, and 1000.

We have had schools. We only have information for government schools. The Government has refused to provide data on non-government schools, on private and independent schools. We do not know how many children have been infected. We have no idea what is happening in those schools. We can only go on what we have been able to garner, on the basis of Greens' questioning of the Health minister in parliament, that more than 1700 children have been infected with COVID-19; 1300 or more of them are in government primary schools. Thirteen people have died in the last three months; that is exactly the same number who died in the two years prior to that.

In this context, the Premier last Friday has called 'masks off': do not worry about it everyone, we are living with COVID-19 now, there is nothing to see here, everything is okay. It is mild, let us just go about our business, particularly go about your business and we will go about the business of looking after the interests of people who fund the Liberal party, who we privilege and prioritise in our policy at this most important part of the pandemic.

The Government has rested its whole basis for Public Health response to COVID-19 now on vaccine protection. How is that going? The Premier keeps saying that we have the highest level of protection in the country. The secretary of the Health Department, Kathrine Morgan-Wicks was on the radio on Monday morning actively misrepresenting the truth. She said, 'Tasmania's very high vaccination rate now sitting at 97 per cent fully vaccinated, or 99 per cent the first dose'. Fully vaccinated is not two doses. ATAGI made that clear in a recent statement on 10 February. ATAGI was clear that you need to have a booster dose to maintain an up-to-date status for COVID-19 vaccination. There has to be the third dose, or a booster, because waning efficacy is apparent now following a COVID-19 vaccination of only two doses for the Omicron variant. Two doses is not a full vaccination according to ATAGI.

Ms Morgan-Wicks was on radio on Monday morning misrepresenting what the Premier stands in here day after day telling Tasmanians, that we have the highest rate of vaccine protection in the country. We do not. The reality is 40 per cent of Tasmanians over the age of 16 have not had a booster dose. All of our children under 12 have not been vaccinated at all. Only 62 per cent have had a first dose; 62 per cent of our vulnerable children who have their whole lives to live, the people we should most care about, six out of 10 have only had one dose. It is flat-lining at 62 per cent. There have been no campaigns rolled out from this Government to encourage, require, incentivise parents to get their children vaccinated.

The Premier has to stop talking about two doses. We have a pathetic vaccination rate. A pathetic protection from vaccines. How good are vaccine protections? According to

OzSAGE, the fantastic group of Australian virologists, immunologists, epidemiologists, vaccinologists, occupational health people, lawyers, people in public health medicine, people in public policy, those independent people not paid a wage to provide independent, high-quality expert advice throughout this pandemic, three doses of a vaccine are very effective at preventing people from being hospitalised and very effective at reducing risk of long-COVID-19.

However, it is only as good as the vaccine you have had. For the people who have not had a full up-to-date level of vaccination that is no good. Vaccines wane and the effectiveness of vaccines is reducing. The latest information from OzSAGE experts is that waning protection against hospitalisation also occurs after a third dose. Vaccines do not provide durable protection. They expect to see the effect of the current vaccine protection in Australia waning by about April. We are in March. Next month we can start to see a drop-off. For the 60 per cent of adults who have had their booster dose in Tasmania we can start to see that losing its effectiveness in the next couple of months. That would be just before winter; just before the high-risk that we have seen in other countries of COVID-19 building up during the winter period. It is not durable. It is part of the answer but it is not the solution.

Why should we care about protecting ourselves from long COVID-19? We are only just commencing the research on long COVID-19, but what we have been able to find out in two years is frightening. Long COVID-19 can be caused by an infection or it can be caused months later or in years later. It can occur even if people have had no symptoms of long COVID-19. It is not just related to people who have been hospitalised or on a ventilator. It can be people who have not been in hospital or not even had symptoms. Large studies in the United States have showed that virus persists in the brain, the heart, the lungs and other organs. There is strong research that shows 37 per cent of people will get some sort of long COVID-19 symptoms. That is the research OzSAGE experts have pulled together and comes from the journal *Cell*.

It can cause very severe long-term complications to the heart. A US study showed twice the risk of heart attacks, of stroke, of heart failure, of heart infections and blood clots a year after COVID-19, regardless of whether a person had been hospitalised. A recent Victorian study of 20 500 long COVID-19 cases found similar types of heart damage, but their study showed much higher risks attached to whether a person had had long COVID-19. We know that COVID-19 persists in the brain and that may lead to changes that look like, under scans, the sort of damage that Alzheimer's does to the brain. There is mounting evidence of neurological and psychiatric effects. A third of people are estimated to have some sort of neurological effects. There is strong evidence of this persisting for people six months afterwards.

Another study showed loss of function and mobility nine months after people had had long COVID-19, regardless of how severe they had had the infection. The largest body of observable symptoms from long COVID-19 is a range of difficult-to-pin-down, hard-to-describe ongoing health problems for people that they have never experienced before. These are real, they are definable and they cause significant patient suffering. Sometimes they resolve after two to three months. In many people we are seeing this continue on.

Mr Speaker, 37 per cent of people will have some sort of long COVID-19 symptoms. Some of them will be deadly, some of them will be disabling, some of them will be severe and permanent, and some of them will resolve. In Tasmania today, because of the Premier's

decision to open the borders without people being properly vaccinated, we have 19 240 so far who, on the evidence, would be at risk of developing some sort of long COVID-19 into the future, if they are not experiencing it now. That is a huge addition to our burden of disease in Tasmania: an enormous addition to chronic disease in a state that can least afford to have any extra people with chronic disease. We already have the highest rates of chronic disease in most categories in Australia. We have an older population, we have a sicker population and we have a very badly equipped health care system to be able to manage it.

Why would the Premier take away masks in this situation? Why do we need them? The Premier was very keen to seek Professor Raina MacIntyre's advice beforehand. He actually chose to take independent expert advice above the director of Public Health, with all due respect to the Director of Public Health - no comment about him. Appropriately, the Premier did seek advice from interstate from experts about the modelling and reopening the borders. Professor MacIntyre was in charge of that work.

What she says about removing masks at this point in the epidemic is very concerning. She published this just a couple of weeks ago, and she made it really clear: masks reduce our risk of getting COVID-19. A properly fitted mask reduces the risk of getting COVID-19 by 83 per cent because it is an airborne virus, compared to 66 per cent for surgical masks and 56 per cent for cloth masks. You also need to wear a mask because you might not know if you have COVID-19. You can show no symptoms at all. If you get COVID-19, you will have a period of time before you get symptoms, if you do, when you not showing any symptoms. You do not feel sick, so people do not know when they are exhaling next to somebody else on the bus, or sitting in a restaurant, or standing next to them at the markets.

Wearing masks protects other people from the high risk of COVID-19 and from long COVID-19. It protects people who have much greater risks for severe COVID-19, people with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses, people with immunocompromised systems, people who are on cancer treatment, who have organ transplants. These are all people living in our community. We do not know who they are. They know who they are and they are afraid. They are not going to restaurants and bars and clubs. They are not comfortable sitting on public transport; they are staying at home.

This proposal to remove all universal mask wearing will mean that they stay at home for much longer. It is absolutely entirely unnecessary. It is something that we can all do and it has almost no effect on anybody. Some research was done in New South Wales recently and the majority of people want to wear masks; 85 per cent of people feel more comfortable when everyone wears a mask. A total 83 per cent of people in the study of New South Wales supported masks being worn inside shops and public venues. The pandemic is not over. New variants will emerge; we do not know when. We must have a multi-pronged approach that includes vaccines and getting our boosters, but also recognising it is not durable protection; we need to have masks. It is a baseline, single, simple form of protection and it is a no-brainer.

Who wants to get rid of masks? Let us have a look at who has been talking in the last couple of days? We had Senator Eric Abetz complaining about the fact that it is uncomfortable and a nuisance. Bad luck, senator. It is hard for you to have a little lack of comfort; meanwhile other people's lives are saved, thanks to you getting out of your comfort zone. We can all get out of our comfort zone when it comes to supporting somebody else.

What about a person with disability? What about when you are speaking to a parent about their child? Ms O'Connor and I have spoken to so many parents who have contacted us and said thank you for listening, thank you for hearing us, thank you for understanding our concern. 'We love our children; we are very concerned about them. We are deeply concerned about our older mother. We are really concerned because we are in breast cancer treatment at the moment. We cannot go outside. I cannot go outside because my wife is in breast cancer treatment. I do not want to bring it home to her; we are staying at home.'

What is the point in making so many Tasmanians stay at home when it is such a tiny impost for the rest of us, and we know that it has a huge effect? It is not just an individual choice, although that is what Senator Eric Abetz is on about - it is all about the individual. This is Prime Minister Scott Morrison's individualistic response to everything and this is how it is boiled down.

The Liberals have only been able to suffer two years of doing things for the community. Two years was a very long time for the Australian and the Tasmanian Liberal Party to really care about other people and put it above their own self-interest. Now we can see what is going on. When it comes to it, right at the pinchiest point of it of the pandemic in Tasmania, 53 000 people have been infected so far; last year, 240. Look at the numbers. Look at the impact from long COVID. Just look at the science. Listen to the epidemiologists. That is what we were doing. We are not doing that today.

Who else is speaking for getting rid of masks? Steve Old was also quoted. The Tasmanian Hospitality Association (THA) said: 'Absolutely ludicrous that people who went to their local bars would still be forced to wear masks'. Mr Old, in December last year, was complaining about Christmas trading and people having to wear masks and saying, 'A lot of businesses are saying it is not worth the risk of having a Christmas lunch if you've got to do the masks and stuff.'. He said that he understood masks are probably here for a little while but this also means there are some issues that we need to work with government and Health Tasmania on to make sure that, where it is not necessary, these rules can be changed slightly without any impact on staff or individuals. He hoped they would be open to those conversations.

It looks like Mr Old got his way again. He has had a chat. Was it to Public Health or was it to the Premier or the minister? We will never find out but he is quite happy to say publicly that he thinks things should be better for trading but we do not actually have any evidence that that is what happens.

As soon as the borders open, Tasmanians bunkered down. Businesses suffered. Events had the slowest trading they have ever had, like the Taste of Tasmania, the Gin Festival. None of them made money. Where is the evidence that it is good for businesses if you do not have universal mask wearing? It is not possible to have an individualised approach to this. Even if you are a person who is immunocompromised and you choose to go out with a mask on, if other people around you are not wearing masks, what are you going to do? Not eat because you do not want to take your mask off? Not have a drink along with everyone else because you do not want to take your mask off? If everyone, most of the time, in a public place is wearing a mask, it reduces the amount of virus that is in the air, simple as that.

It is also the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI). Michael Bailey, shamefully, this morning was quoted as urgently calling on the Premier to repeal or modify COVID-19

restrictions around mask wearing, isolation requirements and COVID-safe bans. He said, 'We want to see the Government reduce restrictions in a blanket capacity and not in this piecemeal approach'. Heaven forbid that we would look at this from a Public Health protection perspective on a day-by-day basis with the aim of putting people's health and safety first. Those were the days when we did that.

Who wants to keep the masks on? I have already mentioned that we have people with disabilities deeply concerned, people who are in cancer treatment, and older people and parents, particularly parents of children at risk. Instead, what we have at the moment is a policy from the Government not only to remove masks but it is a stealth policy. It is the Government's COVID stealth policy. It is about going back to normal business settings that suit the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, that suit the THA. It is also a policy to spend as little as possible on putting in place the supports and making the protections available from the Government's point of view because it will cost the Government money.

We have Tasmanian Government aged care guidelines in place in Tasmania that have the words 'airborne transmission' in there. You can find that sprinkled throughout Tasmanian Government documents. We are not talking about flat-earthers here. It is not that words 'airborne' and 'virus' do not exist in government publications. They do. That is not the policy that is directing where the money flows and where the Public Health measures go. If it was we would be seeing an entirely different landscape. The reality of what an airborne transmission for this virus means is being ignored.

We wrote to Dr Veitch on 11 February. We are very concerned at why there has been no public education response at all from the Government about what effective mask-wearing needs to be. It is entirely clear that wearing a cloth mask, even a surgical mask, is not appropriate for reducing your risk of infection. I already mentioned the figures before: 83 per cent reduction with an N95 or P2 mask, a 55 per cent reduction with a surgical mask, and much less with a cloth mask. We drew the director's attention to recent research about the effectiveness of mask-wearing and the relative ineffectiveness of social distancing. Relying on social distancing, which is almost the last thing on the list of Public Health measures left in place in Tasmania, is not very effective at all if it is not accompanied by proper mask-wearing.

The research is very clear. We pointed out to Dr Veitch that social distancing without masking is associated with a very high risk of infection. When only the person who is susceptible wears a mask, there is a very high risk of infection, even with social distancing. Universal masking is the best strategy. It seems that we set the lowest bar in Tasmania in Public Health interventions. As a whole country we are an outlier internationally for not recommending high-quality face masks for use in the pandemic. We do not understand. The Director of Public Health has not responded to the letter on 11 February about why there has been no decision to mandate the use of N95 or P2 masks in Tasmania. This is what other countries are doing.

Only this week, New York City was considering removing the requirement for children aged two to four to wear a mask in childcare settings. All children, five years and over, where it is appropriate to do so, are wearing masks in school. That is how seriously they are taking the risk of transmission in closed-door settings. That is how normal it is to wear face masks in other countries. We have a problem with contradictory, independent epidemiological advice on the OzSAGE group, which is clear that we should have, from the beginning, made sure our children were protected back at school by wearing face masks if over five.

We wrote to Ms Courtney when she was the minister. She was overseas so she did not get it. She was on a holiday in France. We wrote to the minister asking her why she was not putting that requirement in place because that was an OzSAGE recommendation. They understand it works because they have seen the evidence from overseas. Why are we not doing this to protect our children? Why is the Premier thinking of completely removing the mask mandate at this time in the pandemic?

The best evidence of the Government's COVID-19 stealth policy is wrapped up in the words of the secretary, Kathrine Morgan-Wicks on Monday. She said that it is up to the individual to really look at their own circumstances, particularly with vulnerable people, or people who feel vulnerable. Being vulnerable is not a feeling. It is a reality. If you are older, if you have not had a recent booster, if you are a child under 11 who is not vaccinated at all, if you are immunocompromised, if you are a person with a range of disabilities, it is not a feeling. Vulnerability is a reality. It is a real life risk. For anyone who becomes infected with COVID-19, three to four out of 10 people are at risk of developing some type of long-COVID-19, some deadly, or disabling symptoms, health complications, some of which will affect you for the rest of your life. If you are a child we want to do everything possible to make sure you have the best opportunity of avoiding that infection.

Why would the Premier and this Government go down this path now? It is anti-science. It is against the evidence of what other countries are doing that are successfully putting the brakes on infection spread in the community. We want to see the unredacted advice. We want to know what the Director of Public Health said to the Premier before the Premier made the decision to pull back on wearing masks. Tasmanians want to understand how we could possibly be in this place. How we could be so out-of-step with the science, with the epidemiological, immunological, and virological evidence of what works. We do not understand it. Tasmanians do not understand it. They are angry. They are annoyed. They are outraged and they are very concerned. We want to see it.

It is no reflection on Dr Veitch or Dr McKeown. It is clear what has happened. They have been relegated to the status of every other public servant. That is par for the course for a government that has come back to putting the interests of the THA and the TCCI and Senator Abetz and the federal Liberal Party and their prospects in the future election first. That is what this is about. This is all about being the strong party that gets business back under control.

On behalf of Tasmanians we are absolutely sickened by that and we will continue to speak about the reality. We want to see the advice.

[5.36 p.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Minister for Health) - Mr Speaker, I thank Dr Woodruff for her motion this afternoon. I normally do not have too much trouble following your arguments. Today I did. I have been troubled by the Greens' utterings in recent times. They have been sensationalists -

Ms O'Connor - Who cares what you think of us? We do not care.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, just before the Deputy Premier gets too far into it, this is a serious debate. You have put the question, allow the minister to answer without interjection or comment as he goes through, please.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Sensationalist. Fearmongering. Often false.

Ms O'Connor interjecting.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am ignoring your interjections, Ms O'Connor.

Dr Woodruff, I will start where you left. I, as minister, and this Government utterly reject the accusations around why we make certain decisions. This is a government that has focused on ensuring that the safety of the people of Tasmania. Our community has been the number one focus and number one priority of this Government since the beginning of the pandemic. You covered a range of matters from long-COVID to schools, masks, aged care, which I wish I had time to cover. Out of respect for the state Opposition, I should allow an opportunity to speak as well.

Dr Woodruff interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I will not proceed any further without rejecting your criticisms of outstanding public servants, such as Dr Veitch and those within Public Health -

Dr WOODRUFF - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I absolutely reject that there was any criticism of Dr Veitch. I was very careful to make sure that I spoke of him with the greatest respect.

Mr SPEAKER - Again, it is not a point of order.

Dr Woodruff - There is no criticism of him at all.

Mr SPEAKER - It is not a point of order, Dr Woodruff, and it is also not an opportunity to interrupt the minister.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Government has worked very closely and been guided by Public Health, every step of the way when it comes to the pandemic. I have the utmost respect for Dr Veitch. You criticising the decisions that Government make, when we say that we have been guided by Public Health advice is really attacking the integrity of Public Health. You went so far the other day to say that you questioned the independence of Public Health, which I utterly reject. It is simply not true.

The other matter I want to raise is that I reject any criticism of the Health Commander and the Secretary of Health, Ms Morgan-Wicks, who has been an outstanding leader with her role, not only with the pandemic but also across our health system. Health is challenging enough as it is, let alone in a pandemic, as I am sure members of this House will well appreciate.

We will continue to transition to living with COVID-19 in the same way we did as we were managing the virus before vaccinations, sensibly and responsibly. Just as we were the first state to close our borders at the start of the pandemic, and the first state to set the high vaccination threshold of some 90 per cent for those eligible before lifting those restrictions, we will continue to exercise good judgment based on sound Public Health advice.

I really hope that all the people in the vaccination centres, our state clinics, who have worked so hard since we commenced our vaccination program in and around February last year, if my memory serves me correctly, were not listening to your contribution.

Dr Woodruff - Why not? They are so incensed.

Mr SPEAKER - Dr Woodruff, order. If you do it again, then you will be watching the debate from a television screen outside this Chamber.

Mr ROCKLIFE - You can criticise aspects of our pandemic response all you like but when it comes to our vaccination, our vaccination plan, and the efforts gone into ensuring our very high vaccination rate, it is nothing short of an outstanding success. I commend the leaders across our Department of Health, Ms Morgan-Wicks and many, many others. They are on the ground doing the job so very well, because as we have said repeatedly in this place, and further afield, the number one defence against COVID-19 has been vaccination.

In terms of public health, as the Premier has well stated, when other premiers have distanced themselves from Public Health advice, we have been very solid in continuing the very sound advice that we have received from Public Health. They have been communicated well. At media conferences, where we have made changes or presented plans, such as our reopening plans, there, alongside the Premier, has been a representative of Public Health explaining, be it Dr McKeown, Dr Veitch or others, explaining and taking questions so that the public is informed of the expertise and the advice coming to government. They are listening to Public Health explaining their decisions and taking questions in a very open and transparent way. They have always been available to explain the decisions and the rationale behind those decisions. We have consistently followed the advice since the first day of this pandemic. It has stood us in good stead and we will continue to seek out Public Health advice.

We know that COVID-19 is here to stay; that it is a very transmissible virus. That is exactly why we advocated for very strong vaccination rates and mandated where extra protection is required. Our vaccination rates are some of the highest in the nation. I have some statistics here that clearly back that up. Often comparisons are made between Western Australia's borders opening and other states. We held to the above 90 per cent vaccination rate before we opened our border. Other states - Western Australia, namely - did not have anywhere near the vaccination rate of Tasmania toward the end of last year.

In terms of our vaccination, we have one of the lowest hospitalisation rates per capita in the country. That is a fact. Other states have already moved on mask restrictions ahead of us. New South Wales declared masks are no longer needed indoors except in high-risk settings such as hospitals, aged care facilities and public transport. That was on 25 February, and around the same time Victoria also scrapped face masks for most settings, as did Queensland last week, I am informed.

In Tasmania, we will take a stepped approach, because that is the sensible thing to do, and in line with Public Health advice. I make the point that masks are just one component of a number of measures used to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. We have vaccination mandates for vulnerable sectors, such as aged care and disability, including mandatory requirements for boosters by 1 April 2022. We know that COVID-19 is transmissible through respiratory droplets, small aerosol particles, direct physical contact with an infected individual,

and indirectly through contaminated objects or surfaces. Masks are an accessible method to help minimise the transmission of COVID-19 in the community.

In regard to mask wearing, throughout the public health emergency in Tasmania, the following approaches to high risk have been adopted, separately or in combination, across a range of public health directions, including mandatory vaccination, Check in TAS, and mask wearing and high risk of infection to individual workers due to the nature of the setting, for example, hotel quarantine.

High risk to patients or clients in the setting, severe consequences of infection due to existing vulnerabilities; for example, residential aged care. Higher risk of initiating community spread from an infection in that setting; for example large gatherings; and severe disruption to essential services if workers become sick and have to be quarantined, for example, health care settings.

So, as we announced, and in line with public health advice, masks are no longer required for retail settings as of last Friday, except for staff to ensure business continues. This is a sensible approach: to step down restrictions gradually and in lower settings be mindful the case numbers are still fluctuating.

Further mask restrictions will ease from 5 p.m. this Friday 11 March, including masks no longer being required for patrons at restaurants and cafes, large outdoor events of more than 1000 people, such as Salamanca Market and offices, although businesses should defer to their own COVID-safe plans and business continuity plans as we transition to living with COVID-19. We will continue to step down restrictions sensibly while remaining responsive, as we need to be, given the challenging and changing circumstances that the pandemic has presented us.

Of course, if people wish to keep wearing masks for their own protection they can. I suspect a number will. I suspect I will for settings where there remains increased levels of mixing and mingling, such as pubs and clubs. We will have more to say on this later in the week and again based on public health advice.

For higher risk settings such as hospitals, aged care facilities and transport, mask rules do not change and will remain in place for now. They will also remain for schools until the end of term, if cases are recurring in these settings as was to be expected.

It is important that the Greens in their criticism of government are factual when it comes to their public utterances. Members of parliament not only have a duty to tell the truth in this place and not mislead but also outside. Last week we had a media release from the Greens where it was stated. 'No general prescription for aged care staff to wear masks to protect themselves and the vulnerable people they work with'. This is not true. It is utterly false. In fact, the Tasmanian Residential Aged Care Facilities Direction No. 19, which is publicly available on the coronavirus website clearly states a person who enters, or remains on, the premises of a residential aged care facility must wear a fitted face covering while the person remains on the premises of that facility.

When we are speaking of aged care, and being mindful of the fact of the vulnerable setting that aged care facilities are, there are approximately, I am advised, some 4600 aged care residents in Tasmania. As of 8 March, I am advised that were no residents reported with

COVID-19 nor any workers in the aged care sector. Those figures speak for themselves and prove, in many respects, that we do take the health and safety of our most vulnerable seriously. In Tasmania, a direction made under the Public Health Act is law. The aged care sector in Tasmania operates under various codes, guidelines, and directions, including the Tasmanian Residential Aged Care Facilities Direction No. 19, and information provided by the Australian Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and Commonwealth departments. That is very clear.

I would like to ensure that Tasmanians are well and truly aware. I'm sorry that time has got away from me. I am happy to discuss these matters further. Dr Woodruff raised the issue of long-COVID-19 and I have a fair bit to say about long COVID-19. I have met with people with long COVID-19. I understand the negative impact on people's lives.

Dr Woodruff - You said it - first time that anyone in your Government has said long COVID-19.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That is not true. I am advised that the understanding of long COVID-19 is still evolving in the international medical community. We discussed these matters at Budget Estimates last year, if my memory serves me correctly, particularly around the staff who I have met personally with long COVID-19.

Dr Woodruff - Not since the borders have opened. Not about the risk to children.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We are aware of the potential for long COVID-19 in the Tasmanian population and we are working with the Department of Health to investigate options for monitoring, treatment and support.

The department monitors the prevalence of long COVID-19. I am advised in the community through data obtained as patients are admitted to Public Health facilities like hospitals and outpatient clinics that vaccinated individuals are less likely to experience long COVID-19 and vaccinated individuals who get long COVID-19 typically experience symptoms that are less severe and last for a shorter period.

I am further advised of the current view that long COVID-19 associated with the Omicron variant is less severe than previous variants and people with symptoms will be primarily managed by their GP. I understand that Primary Health Tasmania has developed a post-COVID-19 condition health pathway to guide clinicians in assessing and managing patients with long COVID-19. I will have more to say on long COVID-19 in that respect.

Time has escaped me but I want to reiterate that our response to the pandemic has been guided and supported by Public Health advice ever since the start of the pandemic. We work very closely with Public Health. I recognise that people have had their lives severely disrupted by COVID-19. I would never diminish any life that we have lost as a result of the pandemic. Despite the fact that we have lost 24 lives since the pandemic, our heart goes out to those families. We have done everything we can to ensure that the safety of Tasmanians is the absolute number one priority of this Government.

[5.58 p.m.]

Ms DOW (Braddon - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, throughout the pandemic, the Government has relied on Public Health advice. We have accepted that and we have respected that. I thank our Public Health team who have worked tirelessly over the past two years under pretty difficult circumstances.

We will be supporting this motion but only on the basis that we do not see any harm in Public Health advice being released, as was the case with the previous motion which I did not get the opportunity to speak on. This is about providing information to the community that instils trust and confidence in the way that the Government is managing something that is impacting people's everyday lives. Tasmanians have seen significant challenges over the past three months. It has been a pretty horrific time for many Tasmanians as they have learned to come to grips with having COVID-19 in our community. The Government let them down when it came to contact tracing and testing. The resources just simply were not there. The public directives and advice were changing hour by hour in some instances. People could not keep up. One of the key things is the importance of a good public education campaign. That has been missing throughout this period for Tasmanians. It has led to an erosion of trust in the Government and its ability to manage the pandemic.

Time expired.

Mr SPEAKER - The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided -

AYES 10

Dr Broad
Ms Butler (Teller)
Ms Dow
Ms Finlay
Ms Haddad
Mr O'Byrne
Ms O'Byrne
Ms O'Connor
Ms White
Ms White

NOES 11

Mrs Alexander (Teller)
Ms Archer
Mr Barnett
Mr Ellis
Mr Ferguson
Mr Gutwein
Mr Jaensch
Ms Ogilvie
Mrs Petrusma
Mr Rockliff
Mr Street

PAIR

Mr Winter

Mr Tucker

Motion negatived.

ADJOURNMENT

Petition - Krushka Forests

[6.06 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, I seek the leave of the House to table a petition which is not correctly worded and does not contain a prayer but it is a petition signed by more than 34 000 people who call on Premier Gutwein to protect the native forests of north-east Tasmania.

I can indicate I have spoken to the acting leader of opposition business and I have sought to speak to the Leader of Government Business without much luck yet but I hope that both parties will be fine with us tabling this petition.

Mr Ferguson - Maybe to assist the House, Ms O'Connor no doubt wishes to speak to the petition -

Ms O'CONNOR - I do and I shall.

Mr Ferguson - It would be good if the Government could have a look at it while she does so.

Ms O'CONNOR - Sure. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER - Sorry, before you begin. Given the circumstances and the size of it, I will allow Ms O'Connor to speak to the motion while the Government has a look at it.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Speaker, today and over the next two months the State Forestry GBE, which has been laughably rebadged Sustainable Timbers Tasmania, although we know its true name is Forestry Tasmania, is doing what it does best; that is, flattening forests like no other that exist nowhere else on earth. The Krushka forests, adjacent to the world-famous mountain bike trails of Derby are irreplaceable, impossible to log sustainably but they are being logged. They are glacial refugia forests. This means these forests evaded the last periods of glaciation that carved the great valleys of lutruwita more than 10 000 years ago, refuges for the ancient Gondwana forests from the effects of glaciation. This has allowed them to evolve in a particularly special way, with several species genetically different from similar species in other parts of this beautiful island.

The Gondwana forests of lutruwita and Derby are so named because the fossil records show that when the Gondwana supercontinent existed 65 million years ago, it contained forests similar to those living today. They are the homes of endangered and threatened species, such as the Tasmanian devil, spotted-tailed quoll, masked owl and wedge-tailed eagle. These ancient forests of Tasmania are being slashed and burned by the Gutwein Government while we are in the throes of a climate emergency. They are invaluable and unique carbon stores which are literally being pulped or burned with 80 per cent of Krushka forest slated for woodchips.

Just so we are really clear, these are the forests that encircle the bike trails of Derby, which are a beacon to mountain bike riders from all over Tasmania, the mainland and the rest of the world.

Blue Derby Wild is fighting desperately to stop these remnant forests from destruction. They have written an open letter which I tabled in parliament last year, co-signed by more than 200 tourism operators calling for the destruction to halt: tourism operators who sell the brand of a clean and green Tasmania; and today we have received this extraordinary petition of more than 34 000 signatures. I seek the leave of the House to table this petition.

Leave granted.

Ms O'CONNOR - More than 34 000 people have signed this petition because they understand that what is happening at Derby is a sacrilege. They understand that these forests are worth far more standing. They understand Tasmania's future is in sustainable industries, such as genuinely sustainable tourism, mountain bike riding, for example, and not destructive industries, such as native forest logging - 34 000 people; it is an extraordinary result. I acknowledge the work of Louise Morris from Blue Derby Wild in pulling all these signatures together.

Mr Gutwein, will you stand by all of this destruction of ancient natural heritage? You will scuttle the hopes of these tourism operators, all to pander to this antiquated and destructive industry.

I heard this morning from a number of tourism operators who joined us on the lawns for the handover of this petition that the Premier has to date refused to meet them. What is the Premier afraid of? We are talking about tourism operators, like Lou Morris from Blue Derby Wild; Fiona Weaver, Tassie Bound Adventure Tours; Kenna Reid-Clarke, Vice-President of the Tasmanian Wilderness Guides Association; Joe Pickett, General Manager, Spring Bay Mill; Julia Seymour, owner of Pinned Property Management, Derby; Ben Rea, owner of Tasmania eBike Adventures and a number of organisations, including Inala Nature Tours; Kooparoona Niara Tours; Patagonia; Rare Earth Tasmania; Red Parka; Ben Lomond Alpine Hotel; Blue Mountain Derby; Blue Derby Pods Ride; Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary; Roaring 40s Kayaking; Tarkine Running Co.; Tasmanian Walking Co.; TransTas Enduro Mountain Bike Riding; Rob Blakers from Wild Island; Wild Island Women; Wild Magazine.

All these tourism operators have taken what is quite a courageous decision in Tasmania, where you can be marginalised and targeted by the establishment for stepping up for the protection of nature. All these tourism operators, more than 200 of them, have had the foresight, the conviction and the courage to sign this letter and yet the Premier, so far, will not meet them as the logging continues in and around Derby. This is ideological. It is destructive to tourism, to the climate and to our brand. It has to stop. There is no need for Forestry Tasmania to keep logging. I call on the Premier to meet these tourism operators.

Time expired.

Don Grimes AO - Tribute

[6.13 p.m.]

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) - Mr Speaker, I rise to speak about Don Grimes AO.

The Tasmanian branch of the Labor Party was formed around 1903 and we have been really fortunate to attract really fine people to advance the quest for social justice. I am

delighted to note that the seat of Bass, federally and state, has been at the forefront. Senator Justin O'Byrne, the father of the Senate, former Deputy Prime Minister, Lance Barnard and, of course, Senator Don Grimes AO spring to mind.

I knew Don very well. He was a mentor and he gave a cracking speech at my anniversary event of being 15 years elected. He returned to Launceston from Sydney in 2011. Whenever he was well enough he was a regular attendee at numerous Labor Party functions, usually accompanied by his great friend, Anne O'Byrne. Party members attending those many functions would gravitate around Don to listen to his observations, ideas and simply his incredible wit and good humour. There is no doubt that he was much loved and admired by many Tasmanians and throughout the Labor movement. In fact, some of the more venerable members of the party can even recall his time as a GP at the Riverside practice, which he established with his friend, Brian Cooper, before entering politics.

He was from very humble origins, born in 1937 during the Great Depression in Albury. His dad was a fitter and turner with the government railways. He was schooled in Albury until his mother died of bowel cancer and then he and his sister were sent to live with an aunt in Sydney. He went to Fort Street Boys' High School, where he played rugby and AFL, and then attended the University of Sydney, where he also played intervarsity football and graduated as a medical practitioner in 1962. He then decided to undertake his internship at the Royal Hobart Hospital, accepting locum positions in Hobart, New Norfolk and Launceston and practised on the west coast of Tasmania, Flinders, the Huon Valley and Legana and established deep Tasmanian roots. He left Tasmania for a short time to work in London and returned in 1966 where he served as a district medical officer at Cygnet and established his practice in Riverside.

Don joined the party in 1968, motivated by his disapproval of the Vietnam War and his staunch support for the modern universal health insurance scheme proposed by the Labor Party which would finally be legislated as the Medibank bills in August 1974 after the double dissolution election. He was elected as a senator for that very election and he must have been extremely proud to be one of the members in the House to vote into law that historic piece of legislation, participating in that debate.

Drawing on his experience as a GP, Don challenged arguments from conservatives that the bills which gave us Medicare amounted to and I quote, 'Communism, conscription and fascism'. Don asserted that health care was a core element of social security and, therefore, justly entitled to be funded from progressive taxation. He was re-elected at the double dissolution in 1975. He became the shadow minister for social security in 1976 and fully immersed himself in the portfolio through policy development and fighting critiques of the government of the day. He criss-crossed the country to consult interest groups and led the development of our social security election platforms.

In a paper titled *Labor: Directions for the Eighties* he set out his plans for fundamental social security reform which included replacing the Coalition's view of benefits as a privilege with the Labor perception that they were right to enable all Australians to live in freedom and dignity without regard to their economic circumstances.

In the lead-up to both the 1980 and 1983 elections, he issued social security bulletins highlighting welfare policies and the deficiencies of the government in that area. He was re-elected in 1977 in the half-Senate election and held many important Labor Party positions. He was Tasmanian delegate to the Labor Party's National Conference in Perth in July 1977

where he, along with fellow pragmatists, set about building the federal ALP into an electable alternative government and in December 1980 was elected as the deputy leader of the opposition in the Senate.

With the election of the Hawke Government in 1983, Don was appointed minister for social security and deputy leader of the government in the Senate and following the re-election in 1984 he was appointed to the newly-established position of minister for community services.

Early into his ministry, he established the first Disability Advisory Council of Australia which provided a mechanism for people with a disability to directly advise the government, believing that it was preferable to find out from those with lived experience - the consumers of the service rather than those who may provide it and who may also exact a profit from it.

Don initiated a review which involved a comprehensive public examination of government social policy as it affected people with disability, believing that future government's funds should be directed towards service and programs that provided individuals with the greatest amount of choice and flexibility. The resulting report, *New Directions*, highlighted existing shortcomings, including segregation, institutionalisation, lack of choice and Dickensian-style workshops. In response to the report, Don said:

The aspirations of people with disabilities who want independent living options, realistic training and employment opportunities and better access to ... mainstream community services ...

were not being met.

One of his great achievements as minister was the enactment of the Disability Services Act in 1986, testament to his readiness to challenge the opinions of professional organisations that did not serve the best interests of people and despite fierce opposition secured by partisan support for the act which for the first time linked government funding of organisations to outcomes. He described the bill as a new deal for people with disabilities and provided great support and recognition of their rights and dignity.

Due to ill health, he announced his retirement in 1986 and resigned from the parliament in 1987. He then served as Australian ambassador to the Netherlands and upon his return to Australia was made the chairman of the Australian National Council on AIDS. In that role, Michael Kirby notes that:

Grimes drew on his experience in medical practice and hospital administration, piloting a strategy adopted by Australia to reduce the spread of HIV and AIDS. The strategy he supported included outreach to vulnerable communities; engagement with anti-discrimination law and policy; and embraced the "paradoxical" approach that was to include needle exchange, abolition of criminal offences against gay men and engagement with vulnerable communities.

After many years of living overseas and in Sydney, he returned to Launceston to be closer to his children.

I cannot possibly go through the other initiatives and the events that he was responsible for but in 2015, Don received a lifetime membership of the Tasmanian Branch of the Labor Party and it was my very great honour and pleasure to give the speech in support of that nomination.

Don died on 20 November 2021 at the age of 84. We mourn the passing of this great man. Through his convictions and actions, he actually changed for the better the lives of many Australians. We mourn also the loss of his great intellect, his charm, his warmth, his cheeky grin, especially when he did not quite agree with you but almost did.

In Don's final speech in parliament, he spoke of a need for a country to be more loving and a caring society. His actions were true to that belief. Rest in peace, Don. The world is so much better for you having lived.

Recognition of Visitor

Mr SPEAKER - Honourable members, I acknowledge Senator Nick McKim is here. As most people would know, he is a past member of this House. He is looking rather relaxed I might add.

Members - Hear, hear.

Commissioners for Declarations

Rachael French - Tribute

[6.21 p.m.]

Ms ARCHER (Clark - Attorney-General) - Mr Speaker, I welcome our old foe. When I used to be in your chair, Mr Speaker, I used to have to pull up the honourable senator a few times.

I rise on the adjournment tonight to speak about Tasmania's newest Commissioners for Declarations. I do that because as members would be aware, Commissioners for Declarations play an important role in our justice system and assist many in our community in their administrative role as voluntary legal officers, classed within the same category as Justices of the Peace.

Under Tasmanian law, commissioners are entrusted to witness signature, certify true copies of documents and take statutory declarations, meaning that they handle important documents that could have a significant impact on someone's life. Many members of our community are appointed or declared to be Commissioners for Declarations under our Oaths Act 2001, including people in certain professions, such as dentists, legal practitioners, nurses and veterinarians, statutory appointments or roles such as clerks of the court, public servants, judges, magistrates, police officers or members of a group of persons or organisations declared to be an occupational group.

This wide section of community members who are Commissioners for Declarations ensures that all Tasmanians have access to these important administrative services with locations available from venues across the state.

I am very pleased to announce that in accordance with my powers under the Oaths Act, as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, I have recently signed a declaration to declare managers and coordinators of neighbourhood houses, or community houses, as some prefer to be known, to be Commissioners for Declarations for Tasmania, further increasing access to these services.

Mr Speaker, as you will well know, and all of our members in this House know, neighbourhood or community houses are organisations offering accessible, locally-driven programs which respond to community needs and provide a soft entry point to community and service systems. An integrated network of 35 houses supports Tasmanian communities, with 18 in the south, 10 in the north and seven in the north-west. They are strategically located to lead and coordinate community development in areas of most need and as such, they are in a great position to provide even further support to the many Tasmanians who access neighbourhood houses services, providing more avenues to access document certification and statutory declarations.

A notice will soon be published in the Government Gazette in accordance with the requirements under the act before the managers and coordinators are able to exercise their powers. I requested my department to prioritise this work to add Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania to the list of declared occupational groups under the legislative framework, following receipt of a request by Michael Bishop, who is the CEO of Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania. I personally thank Michael Bishop, who is a great advocate on behalf of his community organisation, which provides invaluable services to the many Tasmanians who use and rely on the 35 neighbourhood houses across the state, many of whom we know are some of the most vulnerable in our communities.

I thank him for pursuing this matter on behalf of Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania and all of the 35 neighbourhood houses across Tasmania. I wish all of the relevant members the very best in their new roles as Commissioners for Declarations in Tasmania and I am sure that members of the public will utilise that service significantly across our state.

While I am on my feet speaking of neighbourhood houses - there are actually three in my electorate - I pay tribute to the strong and dedicated leadership of Rachael French, who has been the manager of Goodwood Community Centre for 11 years now. She is stepping down, a difficult decision for her, I know. She is stepping down to take on other challenges in life, I am sure, but I did want to thank her deeply for the work that she has done, not only in Goodwood but in the greater Glenorchy area. She has been an absolute delight to work with across so many issues facing our local community. My wonderful electoral officer, Lisa, has worked with Rachel on a number of occasions for applications for funding things such as CCTV, unfortunately because there is a lot of vandalism that occurs, particularly in their community garden.

Under Rachel's leadership for the past 11 years, Goodwood Community Centre has provided exceptional support to our community by providing a safe, welcoming, and very caring place for Goodwood community members to meet and engage in the many social activities and learning opportunities that they offer. All our Neighbourhood Houses across the state offer the same types of services.

Rachel has a lot to be proud of regarding the achievements of and the advocacy for the centre under her management, including a very strong volunteer base. There are some wonderful volunteers, including a volunteer board of management.

A huge thank you and congratulations on her very personal contribution to the Goodwood Community Centre and the broader community. There will be a farewell, which unfortunately is going to be during a sitting day. For those of us who may not be able to attend, we wish her well with her future endeavours. The initiative to make managers and coordinators of Neighbourhood Houses and community houses Commissioners for Declarations is a very positive move. The take-up will be quite extensive.

Transgender Women - The Right to Play Sport

[6.27 p.m.]

Ms HADDAD (Clark) - Mr Speaker, I am saddened to be speaking about this topic tonight, but have nevertheless decided to address something that I do not think should be an issue for parliament or an issue of contention. It is Liberal Senator Claire Chandler's bill which she says is about saving women's sport. Prime Minister Scott Morrison recently described it as terrific.

Since her election to the federal parliament, Senator Chandler has pursued very few issues other than this one. It could be described as a crusade: a crusade against transgender women and girls. It is one I have found extremely worrying.

This Chamber has listened to me talk about the dignity and rights of transgender Tasmanians since I arrived in this place. I will continue to do so. I will do so tonight as the rights of transgender women and girls to simply play sport are under threat. The fact is transgender women and girls do play sport. They have done so for a very long time. Sporting codes as well as sporting bodies like Sport Australia have for a long time had in place guidelines and supports for the safe involvement of transgender women and girls in their leagues.

The senator in her public comments highlights specific instances of elite athletes performing at the highest of levels. What she rarely makes clear is that her bill will affect young transgender girls and women playing sport in Tasmania and around the country at all levels: school sport, club sport, community sporting events.

It would actively exclude these young women and girls at a time when they should be, and currently are, warmly embraced and included. It would strip transgender women and girls of the right to live freely, and cast them in an unfair and uncertain legal status. It would do so despite the fact that transgender women and girls have been playing sport and accessing women's services for decades without any of the problems predicted by Senator Chandler in promoting her bill. Many women's organisations in Tasmania have made public statements to that effect.

I thought long and hard about whether I would speak about this topic in the Tasmanian Parliament again. My hesitation is because I recognise that every time the lives of transgender people are raised in the public sphere, when they are being raised by the senator, it does harm to transgender people and their families, and all who love and respect them. It is traumatising. It is harmful. It does real and tangible harm but sadly, the lives of transgender people are being

used once again as a political football in this federal election campaign. Sadly, Senator Chandler does not seem to be very worried at all about the harm that she causes in her statements to transgender women and girls each time she promotes her bill or makes other statements which exclude and diminish the lives of trans people.

In raising the issue here this evening I want to first of all recognise that harm. In doing so I decided that instead of giving further airtime to Senator Chandler's hurtful bill, I would instead highlight the incredible work being done for the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians and people around the country. This is not a comprehensive list of organisations, it is just a snapshot, a few examples.

Equality Tasmania is an advocacy group made up of volunteers who are specifically pursuing equality for LGBTIQ+ community members in Tasmania and around the country. It delivers ongoing activities, including media commentary and parliamentary lobbying on legislation such as this bill.

Working it Out is Tasmania's gender and sexuality support and education service. It provides free and confidential counselling, support groups, education programs and workplace training and visits schools around the state, breaking down stigma and discrimination and improving lives.

TasPride provides a voice and a close-knit community for LGBTIQ+ Tasmanians and their friends and families, including an annual weeklong program of events during the TasPride festival.

LGBTIQ+ Health Australia is the national peak health organisation for other organisations and individuals that provide health-related programs, services and research focused on LGBTIQ+ people and their communities.

Black Rainbow is Australia's leading Aboriginal suicide prevention and mental health support service for LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal people.

PFLAG Australia supports and works with parents, family and friends of LGBTIQ+ people.

Trans Pride Australia is a social and support group for trans and gender-diverse people.

Headspace is an Australia-wide online phone and in-person support and counselling service for young people and their families and friends.

Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council is a national body that advocates for the rights of multicultural and multifaith LGBTIQ+ people.

I will not go on. I did have more listed but I fear I will run out of time if I do. This is a small snapshot of some of the dedicated community organisations who are working every day to break down stigma and discrimination, to assist people to live their best lives. It is just a small sample of these organisations working very hard and doing enormous good in our community.

I know Tasmania to be a warm, inclusive, loving community that rejects the politics of fear and division. I know that Tasmanian women, both cisgender and transgender women stand united for inclusion and equality. I look forward to a time when the lives of transgender and gender diverse people are not used by conservative politicians for political gain.

COVID-19 - Effects on the Human Body

[6.33 p.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, I want to make some comments about the concerning effects of COVID-19 infection in the human body. I want to return to some of the things the minister provoked by his comments earlier.

For the first time that Ms O'Connor or I can remember he uttered the words, 'long COVID-19'. This is the first time we are aware of that long COVID-19 has been discussed since the start of this pandemic in any meaningful way. There has been stony silence from the Premier, from the Minister for Health, from departmental staff, from the secretary about long COVID-19, about the concerns of Tasmanians about the impacts of the rampant COVID-19 transmission and the large number of people who have now become infected it. The research is clear that COVID-19 in the body can have what is called long COVID-19 effects. It can remain in the system and cause long-term complications at a later date.

Why is the Government refusing to acknowledge the reality of long COVID-19, the reality of the long-term consequences for a large proportion of people who have been infected with COVID-19, regardless of whether those people end up in hospital or not. Some 37 per cent of people, according to the research from Cell Reports, reported by the OzSAGE group of Australian experts, independent, unpaid experts, epidemiologists, most of whom are professors and doctors of expertise in their area.

The only reason that the Government does not talk about it that I have been able to conclude is because of money. It is the only reason that make sense. Once you acknowledge the potential health impact of this virus, once you take responsibility for that then you are required to do something about it. Doing something about it takes resources. The minister pointed to that, very clearly, in the comments that he made earlier. He said that long COVID-19 is basically something for GPs to manage. They will manage it. It is the GPs' problem. Ergo, it is Commonwealth funding. It is an issue for GPs, one-on-one again, individualising the situation and the responsibility, taking it away from the responsibility of the Health department, the resources of this Government and looking only at the single measure of whether a person ends up in hospital. The secretary of the department, Kathrine Morgan-Wicks confirmed that in her comments to ABC this week. She said:

We will closely watch, not just the case numbers, we are closely watching the hospitalisations and the ICU rates. It is the real tell in terms of the impact.

Well, it is the real tell from Ms Morgan-Wicks' comments about what the priorities of this Government are. They are only focused on the number of people in hospital. They only care about the number of people who are taking up a hospital bed, in ICU, or in ventilation. They do not give an absolute toss for the 53 000 people who have been infected so far, each day and counting - another 1000 at the moment are being added to that number - an extraordinary proportion of whom, 19 240, I calculate, if you just look at the figure, the average

estimate figure of a person who has a risk, according to the science, of going on to have some type of future complication or some sort of long COVID-19 symptoms from being infected with the virus. It may be another 1000 tomorrow. The great majority of them are people who have not had an opportunity to be vaccinated. They have not had an opportunity to take the precautions that we know will reduce their risk of going on to have long COVID-19.

If the Government takes this seriously as being an airborne transmission virus, which it is, then the Government is required to have an education program for Tasmanians to tell us how to use our masks effectively; to educate us about why we need to have N95 or P2 masks and not cloth masks and not surgical masks. These are not good enough. They do not provide the high level of protection that we deserve. It is what is required to protect us.

It would mean that the Government would have to have a program put in HEPA filtration into our schools and into our public buildings. It would require the private sector to look at HEPA filtration when they are erecting buildings for public use. This should be something we think of and resource as a government because the pandemic is not over. It has an unknown length of time to follow through.

Mr Speaker, I can tell from your grimaces, I can tell from the comments of the minister that this Government hates the Greens coming in here and talking about this. The minister spent five minutes lambasting us for making alarmist statements but not once has he pointed to them. I tell him to point to what the science is telling us and rebut it.

Time expired.

Ross Youngman - Swim Across the Great Lake

[6.40 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Mr Speaker, tonight I pay a tribute to Ross Youngman. I want to speak and reflect on the achievements of one of the great Tasmanians, Ross Youngman, who is just a little older than me. He is also an old school mate from Launceston Church Grammar School. Last Saturday on 5 March, Ross Youngman accomplished an Australian first and a world first; a remarkable personal achievement which many Tasmanians did not witness but which I would like to draw to the attention of the parliament. I have personally congratulated Ross Youngman and tonight I would like to pay a tribute to him in this way in the parliament.

Last Saturday, Ross Youngman completed the first known swim across the Great Lake in Tasmania's Central Highlands, north to south, the highest freshwater lake in Australia. This was a challenging 25.5 kilometre swim in 15-degree water, which Ross completed in a little over 10 hours, supported by eight childhood friends. Amazing.

I was returning from the Hamilton Show and checked in on progress with his brother, Mark Youngman, who I consider a colleague and a friend and also an old school mate. Ross was progressing very well, having started at 4.15 a.m., swimming some nearly 26 kilometres in the dark for over 10 hours and only stopping every 30 to 45 minutes or so for food and drink from a support kayak. It was tricky I understand in the first hour or so in the dark, with navigation not 100 per cent in Ross's favour so there was a delay of over an hour in this swim.

It is a long, cold swim and Ross did that wearing just a pair of Speedos and a swim cap and goggles. No wetsuit. They are the rules for long-distance swims of this nature. It was a record that Ross has now achieved. Great congratulations. He was covered in oil, I understand to provide some level of protection but it is a remarkable achievement and one which clearly takes significant planning. I am told Ross had been planning the swim for about six months. I understand that his team included two experienced English Channel swimmers.

I commend his team, including Rod Watkins, Marcus Archer, Jock Gibson, John Dowling, Richard Fazackerly and, of course, his brother Mark, who, as I say, is a good friend, who provided terrific support morally and physically as well. Thank you to his friends and his supporters who made such a difference.

Even with the intensive planning, I understand they had an early problem, as I indicated, being a little bit lost in the dark. I congratulate Ross on his achievement and recognise him as a great Tasmanian.

This is one of many of Ross's accomplishments. I note that Ross has already completed a number of well-known long-distance swims, including Western Australia's iconic swim from Perth to Rottnest Island, a swim that I achieved with three others some years ago when I was in the Senate. It was a team event with four in total.

Ms Finlay - Did you see the quokkas at the end?

Mr BARNETT - Yes, I saw the quokkas when we got to Rottnest Island. I was not totally delirious. It was seven hours and 20 minutes but we rotated the swimming, unlike Ross who has just done that just short of 20 kilometres swim. That is as the crow flies. Of course, the crow does not fly straight when you are swimming, I can assure you of that.

Ross won the English Channel relay with Tom O'Byrne and Jennifer Reid three years ago and has been waiting two years to do the solo swim but COVID-19 got in the way.

Ross, I understand, is also the first Tasmanian to swim the Derwent River from New Norfolk to the Tasman Bridge. I congratulate Ross on that. I caught up with Ross this year. Together with my wife, we did the trans-Derwent swim. Ross did it both ways, across and back and across again. The swim I did was with 100 brave souls with an outgoing tide. One of my mates ended up in Macquarie Point and came back on a jet ski because the current took him down to Macquarie Point. I was pleased to complete that with Kate, who was a little bit ahead of me. Felicity Harrison swam the New Norfolk to Hobart swim the day before the trans-Derwent swim in a little over eight hours.

Ross has a view that Tasmania can be a destination for adventure swims. I look forward to supporting him.

The ironman event announced today by the Premier and Minister for Sport and Recreation, Nic Street is a great opportunity for Tasmania. The Ironman 7.3 is an exciting announcement. The event will be held in Tasmania for the next five years. It comprises a 1.5 kilometre skim, 90 kilometre bike ride and 21 kilometre run on 5 February next year. I am looking forward to the Diabetes Tasmania PolliPedal ride this Saturday to finish the three days that have been scheduled of 100 kilometres in and around Hobart. It raises support and awareness of people with diabetes in Tasmania.

Building and Construction - Call for a Parliamentary Inquiry

[6.47 p.m.]

Ms BUTLER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, I rise on this adjournment to talk about the need for a parliamentary inquiry into building and construction. We have received many representations from people around Tasmania who have been affected by the collapse of Hobart Hotondo and Inside Out Construction. We have also received representations from people who were affected by the collapse of Urban and Hotondo Sorell.

Urban's collapse was only eight months prior to the collapse of Inside Out Construction, yet the Government is not considering those people affected from the collapse of those building companies as part of the compensation package they are providing to Hotondo Hobart and Inside Out Construction.

We support the compensation packages that are being provided to those people affected, but we want to know why the other building companies and the other people who have been affected by those collapsed companies are not being compensated, despite some of those people communicating with CBOS and the minister's office. They were well aware these people had suffered great financial loss when these building companies collapsed. There is not one rule for some and one rule for others with this.

We will be pursuing the case for compensation to be provided to other people who have suffered from the adverse effects of a building collapse. It is not just the residential people who are homebuilders, we are also talking about tradies who have been implicated, suppliers that have been implicated. If you look at the liquidation reports, or the administration reports, from Hotondo Hobart or Inside Out, especially Inside Out actually, huge amounts of debts owed to so many different people.

On this adjournment, I will read a letter and this was provided to me and I believe Ms Archer has also received this letter. This is from a family who were affected by the collapse of Hotondo Homes Sorell in 2020. It is not the first time this has happened to a Hotondo franchise in Tasmania. She writes:

I write regarding the collapse of NB Contracting Pty Ltd trading as Hotondo Homes Sorell in 2020. Last week I also forwarded correspondence to the Premier regarding our dilemma.

In August 2019 my husband and myself engaged NB Contracting Pty Ltd, trading as Hotondo Homes Sorell, to build a residential dwelling on our property at Bellerive. Subsequently, the company went into liquidation and we lost \$17 500.

We engaged Hotondo Homes as it was a nationally-recognised brand and we believed we would be safe engaging them to conduct our build. How very wrong we were.

Please see below an attached complaint made to Consumer Building and Occupational Services, CBOS, in early 2020. I have followed this matter up with CBOS on numerous occasions and to date have received no updates as to progress or an end to the matter.

It was unbelievable to us at the time that there was nothing in place that would protect us in such a circumstance and we could not afford to take legal action, which we were advised would be fruitless due to the amount the company was in debt.

We were simply small fish. It would seem nothing could be done for us to help recoup our deposit. To add to the anguish, the company director very quickly started up another company and to this day is back in the building game. To us, it seems criminal.

The anguish, heartache and embarrassment we have felt has affected us greatly and put all our plans on pause. We are a family with two young children and have made sacrifices over the years to be able to save the deposit. Now, if we choose to start the building process again we are faced with hugely increased building prices, not to mention trust issues. We have also missed out on grants that were available whilst we built the deposit back up and begin to feel comfortable to start the process again.

Recent media reports regarding the collapse of Hotondo Homes New Town have, of course, stirred up a lot of emotions we were trying to put to bed and we deeply feel for and sympathise with those affected.

We then felt some relief when the Government support package was announced, thinking we too may be able to recoup some of our losses and possibly move on from the last two years of anguish.

However, upon reviewing the support package on offer it would seem that it will only be offered to property owners affected by the death, disappearance or insolvency of a builder since 1 July 2021. As our builder went insolvent in 2020 this would not apply to us.

Upon discovering this we were met with the same feelings of despair, anguish and heartache that we felt back in 2020. It just doesn't seem fair that we too are not offered the support.

I write to ask that you please consider the customers of NB Contracting Pty Limited, trading as Hotondo Homes Sorell, in the Government's support package. Any assistance that could be offered would be greatly appreciated and may just help my family put the last two years of anguish behind us.

During the last two years, we have been active in reporting the matter to CBOS and have followed the matter up with them on numerous occasions. We are now at the point where we do not receive any response.

Now, I find that part of their letter to be quite concerning. It is one of the things that we really need to look at in a parliamentary inquiry, why we have such deficient regulatory and legislative protection for consumers in Tasmania. I note as well that the inclusion of a home builder warranty insurance scheme, yes, it is good but it should be scrutinised in a parliamentary inquiry. We should be trying to ascertain what is going to best fit our

community, what is best going to fit our industry and the Tasmanian building and construction sector.

Also, I would like us to have a look at CBOS. We certainly need to make sure that we come up with better protections for Tasmanian consumers. We also need to make sure that these people will be compensated the same as the others.

Time expired.

The House adjourned at 6.54 p.m.