



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF DEBATES

Thursday 24 March 2022

REVISED EDITION

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Thursday 24 March 2022

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

STATEMENT BY DEPUTY PREMIER

Missing Child - Shayla Phillips

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Deputy Premier) - Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Tasmanian parliament, I place on record that our thoughts are with young Shayla Phillips, her family and loved ones during what is an extraordinarily difficult and challenging time.

I recognise the work of Tasmania Police, the SES and volunteers who are continuing their search efforts today.

On behalf of all members, we are sending our thoughts, hopes and prayers.

MOTION

Leave to Move Motion without Notice - Motion Negatived

[10.04 a.m.]

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move a suspension of standing orders to move the following motion:

That this House censures Ms Archer and Mr Ferguson for their failure to apologise to victim/survivor Tiffany Skeggs after they groaned when a question was asked on her behalf in this parliament, which:

- (a) caused enormous harm and distress to Ms Skeggs and other victims/survivors at the time.
- (b) continues to cause damage by making victims/survivors feel minimised, disregarded, gaslit and further traumatised.
- (c) fails to meet the standards of this House and the standards the Tasmanian community expects to see from elected members of parliament.

I seek leave to debate this motion forthwith, given how serious this matter is and continues to be, on behalf of the victim/survivor herself, Tiffany Skeggs, but all victims/survivors who continue to feel aghast that Mr Ferguson and Ms Archer refuse to apologise for their appalling behaviour.

Mr SPEAKER - Leader of the Opposition, I must inform you of standing order 142 which says that a member shall not reflect upon the vote of the House. You can seek leave but I will rule out anything that reflects on the vote of the House from yesterday.

Ms WHITE - Which vote is that, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER - It is the vote on the motion that the Greens put forward.

Ms WHITE - This is a censure motion.

Mr SPEAKER - It is a censure motion but the House has dealt with the apology issue.

Ms WHITE - Mr Speaker, I dissent from your ruling. I do not believe it is appropriate for the House to not be able to debate an issue of censure.

Mr SPEAKER - What I have indicated is that the information I gave you around standing order 142 is for anything that arises through the debate. You can move the motion to suspend standing orders but the House cannot go back into another debate that we had yesterday because that has been dealt with. Through the process, members must be aware that they cannot refer to yesterday's vote.

Ms WHITE - Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance on my dissent from your ruling. Have you now clarified that I can move a censure?

Mr SPEAKER - I have not made a ruling. I have informed you that you can move your motion but you must stay clear of the debate that happened yesterday.

Ms O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. As I understand it, that standing order applies to any normal debate. However, this is a motion of censure and motions of censure, similar to those of want of confidence, have different rules applied to them. Could you seek some advice from the Clerk as to whether that applies to this debate?

Mr SPEAKER - It is a three-step process. I have said you can continue with the initial seeking of leave. Through the debate, when it gets to that point, we need to be aware of standing order 142.

Ms O'BYRNE - My question, Mr Speaker, is does Standing Order 142 apply in a censure or a want of confidence motion?

Mr SPEAKER - I have indicated where we are going. I have allowed the Leader of the Opposition to continue the seeking of leave. I remind people that we are on the seeking of leave. We cannot go to the debate we had yesterday.

Ms WHITE - Mr Speaker, I am mindful that I now have very few minutes left to propose the argument that we should suspend standing orders to debate this motion.

Mr SPEAKER - Then you need to put your arguments. Yes, continue.

Ms WHITE - Because of your decision to provide advice throughout my contribution on the seeking of leave, it leaves me with two and a half minutes.

This is an urgent motion because it goes to the standards of this House - the standards we are willing to accept as elected representatives of our community and the standards that we are not willing to accept. There are certain standards that have not been met by ministers of this Government. In particular, Mr Ferguson and Ms Archer have not met the standards as I see them described in the code of ethical conduct that we commit to uphold as elected members of

this place, nor the ministerial code of conduct which requires ministers to treat people with respect. That has not been upheld in this instance.

This is a matter that must be resolved by this House. Leave should be granted to debate this motion, which is a censure motion, a very serious motion, about the conduct of Ms Archer and Mr Ferguson, and their failure to uphold certain standards. In particular, to respect the wishes of victims/survivors who have called on them to apologise, who have asked to be treated with decency and respect, not to be left feeling minimised, disregarded, gaslit and further traumatised which is, as a consequence of their behaviour, both on 10 March this year and their subsequent behaviour.

This is a censure motion because we have given ample opportunity through the course of this week for these ministers to apologise for their appalling behaviour, and they have failed to do so.

This must be debated urgently. It is a matter of seeking to suspend standing orders so that we can debate this motion.

Mr SPEAKER - Leader, you cannot use yesterday's debate in the debate today. The House dealt with that issue of an apology yesterday. We cannot reflect on that on that vote.

Ms WHITE - This goes to the standards of these ministers, Mr Speaker. With respect, this is about the standards that are upheld, or have failed to be upheld by these ministers. I cannot for the life of me understand why it has taken another day. It has now been two weeks in which they have been allowed to get away with this behaviour by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, and the Deputy Premier, Mr Rockliff. It is completely out of keeping with the standards that the people of Tasmania expect of their elected officials in this place.

[10.11 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, the Greens strongly support the seeking of leave, and we encourage you to allow a full debate.

It is interesting to be reminded of not being able to reflect on a previous vote. Sometimes that is forgotten in this place when Government members reflect on previous votes and the way other members of this House have voted.

Twice yesterday, debate on this issue was gagged. This is a debate that the House should have because the question has not been resolved and the matter has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the victim/survivor here, Tiffany Skeggs. Two weeks after this pair of ministers disrespectfully groaned and sniggered during a question put by Ms White where she articulated the hurt of Tiffany Skeggs, we are back in here with these two ministers having expressed no contrition whatsoever. They have avoided this Chamber when we have been debating the issue, they have refused to apologise, and they have hidden behind the Premier's apology. Their behaviour stands in stark contrast -

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, again, this is about the seeking of leave. It is not about the debate. I have already indicated to you that you cannot use or reflect on the debate from yesterday.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Speaker, I have not quite heard the standing order interpreted in such a way that you cannot even mention that there was a debate yesterday. I am quite surprised at this interpretation of the standing orders, which seems to me an attempt to shut down this debate.

Mr SPEAKER - The House went to a debate yesterday and it voted on an outcome. That outcome has to be respected or otherwise our processes fall down. Standing Order 142, as I indicated earlier:

A Member shall not -

(a) reflect upon any vote of the House ...

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your guidance. I was not reflecting on the vote. I was talking about the fact that we had the debate yesterday and that is within standing orders. We are able to reflect on the fact that there was a debate and, in the seeking of leave, we are able to point to the behaviour of these ministers over the past two weeks and in this House yesterday. I am not talking about the vote. I am talking about the fact that these two ministers - who continue to behave like children - have not apologised to Ms Skeggs. They have not had the decency to do the right thing. That is a statement of fact. It is not a reflection on the vote.

I remind the House that we have not had the full debate on censure, because it was cut short yesterday by your ruling, as was the previous motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. The House has twice now been gagged on this issue. We encourage you, Mr Speaker, to allow the matter to be fully debated.

This is no trivial matter. There is a woman who was betrayed by the state, who is sitting in her home right now feeling broken and betrayed again. It is a very serious matter, and it should not be gagged. We should have a full censure debate. We should pass through the seeking of leave and the suspension and debate censure, because the House has not had that debate. It has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the full House because we did not hear from other members, apart from the leaders of the three parties. We did not hear from the two ministers who are the subject of the censure motion - and rightly so. They continue to dig in, and behave like petulant, disrespectful children. It is a fact that they were not in the Chamber yesterday during the debate that preceded the vote we are not allowed to talk about.

We support the seeking of leave. On a human level, I encourage Ms Archer and Mr Ferguson just to get this done. Get it done: say sorry. You know you did the wrong thing. You know you did. Ms Skeggs knows you did.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Speaker, they know they did the wrong thing. Ms Skeggs knows they did the wrong thing. I am sure their colleagues would rather that they just apologised so that the House can get on with its business. That is all that is needed here. It is not hard to say sorry - that is what this House is asking for, and because of the failure to apologise, we are now facing another censure motion.

Mr SPEAKER - Again, you have just reflected on the vote yesterday. There was a vote on that very issue about an apology.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am not reflecting on the vote.

Ms O'BYRNE - Point of order, Mr Speaker. Can I just confirm yesterday's vote was on the seeking of leave?

Mr SPEAKER - No. The vote yesterday was on Ms O'Connor's motion and the debate that we went through there with the motion.

Ms O'BYRNE - A notice of motion before the House being put and voted on does not prevent the House escalating the matter to either censure or want of confidence.

Ms O'Connor - That is right.

Mr SPEAKER - This is not a debate. Ms O'Connor has the floor, and I have indicated that she cannot reflect on the vote yesterday. Ms O'Connor had a motion yesterday that indicated a requirement for members to apologise. Ms O'Connor just raised that in her contribution. I have reminded Ms O'Connor that is not appropriate - it is reflecting on the vote that we had yesterday, on her motion.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Mr Speaker. Again, I state that I am not reflecting on the vote. I am pointing to a debate that was had, and cut short - two debates; in fact, three debates, if you include our private members' time which was not cut short. These two ministers need to apologise to Ms Skeggs and other victims/survivors. This House has not dealt with this issue, not fully, because the debate has been gagged.

Time expired.

[10.18 a.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Deputy Premier) - Mr Speaker, I express my support for Ms Skeggs and acknowledge her harrowing experience, and also her courage for standing up for victims and survivors. Through her courage, Ms Skeggs has made, and continues to make, an enormous difference to the lives, not only of victims/survivors now, but also ensuring we can improve processes across Government to ensure the supports are there for victims and survivors and most importantly ensure that, as much as possible, it never happens again -

Ms O'Connor - Surely you are embarrassed by your colleagues.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I acknowledge the bravery and courage of Ms Skeggs, and I support the Premier in his sincere and heartfelt apology to her on behalf of all ministers and all members of this Government. As Acting Premier and Deputy Premier in this House I also apologise and say sorry to Ms Skeggs as the Premier has done. The most important thing is that the courage of Ms Skeggs and many others who have come forward and stood up for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse is that the commission of inquiry which has been set up through the leadership of our Premier leaves no stone unturned and ensures that the harrowing experiences of far too many young people, over many decades, tragically, never happens again.

I respect the move to seek leave. These matters were well canvassed and have been well canvassed throughout a number of debates in this House throughout the week, including of course Ms O'Connor's motion yesterday, during which I placed a number of comments on record on behalf of the Government. I want to also once again, on behalf of the Premier, reiterate his apology made on behalf of all ministers and all members of this Government.

[10.22 a.m.]

Ms JOHNSTON (Clark) - Mr Speaker, I indicate to the House I will be supporting the seeking of leave for this motion. It is the first time I have been able to address the House on this very serious matter. I will be supporting the seeking of leave as I believe quite firmly that this matter is urgent. It is quite clear that the conduct of minister Ferguson and minister Archer on 10 March has caused harm and continues to cause harm to a person who does not deserve to be harmed. She has called quite clearly for an apology.

The continuation of harm to any individual is abhorrent. It must stop. It is an urgent matter by definition. We cannot allow harm to be continued. It is not a difficult matter to offer an apology to put a stop to the harm. We cannot have a Tasmanian who is being harmed continuously by ministers of this Government without this House taking action. It is absolutely urgent that we deal with this matter now. The conduct of these two ministers, during this week in particular, is only adding to the harm. The fact that the Government continues to allow these two ministers to hide and not apologise personally adds to the harm. It is urgent that we put a stop to the harm now. It must happen.

The other reason this matter is particularly urgent is that it has become quite clear that the community who rally around and support victims/survivors, not just Ms Skeggs but other victims/survivors, cannot move on until these two ministers have apologised. They cannot move on with their lives and have confidence in this Government and in particular in the way they will handle the commission of inquiry until we have an apology. There is a big block for our community in moving forward and it cannot be allowed to continue. This matter is urgent.

What is quite clear having watched the debate of the last two days from home, following Public Health orders, is that this House cannot move on until we have the two ministers do the decent and right thing. It is urgent. There are other matters of importance that this House needs to deal with but a shadow hangs over all our heads in this House while we continue to allow two ministers of this Government to hide and not do the right thing.

It is urgent that we deal with this matter today. When we come back here in a couple of weeks' time to continue the matters of parliament, we need to be able to move on. We need to be able to discuss other things that are important to our community, but we cannot do that because there is a shadow hanging over all our heads. It not only reflects incredibly poorly on the two ministers, Mr Ferguson and Ms Archer, but it reflects poorly on the standards of this House and on all of us who are here.

It is an urgent matter. It is a matter that deserves to be heard, to be debated, to be considered. It is about the mental health and wellbeing of one person in particular, but also of all Tasmanians and of all victims/survivors. To not allow this debate today, to not support the seeking of leave, is quite frankly an abomination and it tells the community that this Government does not care about integrity, about doing the right thing and, in particular, says they do not care about victims/survivors.

That is not good enough. It is not a House that I want to be a part of and I do not think it is a House that many members of the Government want to be a part of. I strongly urge members of this parliament to support the seeking of leave so that we can have the opportunity to debate this censure motion. I am particularly interested in Government members to put on the record their thoughts too because I believe there are members of the Government who are uncomfortable with the actions of minister Archer and minister Ferguson. I witnessed yesterday the Deputy Premier's heartfelt address to parliament and I saw how difficult he found that -

Mr SPEAKER - Ms Johnson, I remind you we are on the seeking of leave, not about the motion.

Ms JOHNSTON - I am talking about the urgency, Mr Speaker, about why we need to have this matter resolved today, and why it is urgent we debate this matter today. It is urgent because it is continuing to cause harm. I believe all members of this parliament deserve the opportunity to put on record their thoughts about this particular situation and the behaviour of ministers Ferguson and Archer. I will be supporting the seeking of leave and I hope that the members of the Government might be able to reflect deeply and support this as well because it is the right thing to do - again, the right thing to do.

[10.29 a.m.]

Ms DOW (Braddon - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, I cannot really believe that we are back here today doing this again; it is an indictment on this place. As others have said, the standards to which we are held in this place - this is no way to treat the Tasmanian community in general and it is no way for this House to conduct its business. We have seen a series of events - even this morning - where we have seen changes to the way that directives have been given around even the tabling of this censure motion today and seeking leave to debate it.

It is a crying shame that it has got to this; it did not need to. Sorry really does seem to be the hardest word for these two ministers and you cannot understand why it is so difficult. It is urgent to debate this today, as others have said, with great empathy and great understanding of the reasons why we should be debating this censure motion today. We have the responsibility to the Tasmanian people to do that. This matter has not been discussed fully in this place, and it needs to be. As I said before on this debate, it is about healing for Tasmania. It is about victims/survivors who have suffered and endured so much at the hands of our state. At the very least, an apology for certain actions in this place could be made. I cannot understand why that is not forthcoming. Even the Acting Premier has done the right thing today and put his apology on the record. I thank him for that.

We should be having this debate. We should not have had this important debate blocked four times now. It is an important debate. It is what is expected of us, as people representing our communities. It is not good enough that the Government seeks to block this at every opportunity. What does that say about this Government? What does it say about their integrity? It is an indictment on the entire Government. That is not fair either, because I am sure there are members on the other side who do not feel the same way about how this has been handled, and would like the opportunity to put their thoughts on the record about this important matter. It is about people. It is not about politics. It is about people who are hurting, and those people deserve an apology from those two ministers.

I repeat: I cannot understand why this apology has not been forthcoming. I know the Premier says he has apologised unreservedly and I thank him again for his apology, as I thank minister Jaensch. They had the courage to apologise. Others have not.

We would not move to stall parliament or the important debate that will happen here today. Question time is critically important, as has been the business of the House over the last number of days. This has gone on far too long. There has to be a point in time where there is a pause and reflection by these two ministers. It is not going to go away for the Government.

Put simply, Mr Speaker, we need to debate this censure motion today. The House needs the opportunity to have a more robust debate about this very sensitive and important matter before the Tasmanian parliament and also before the Tasmanian community. We stand beside victims/survivors. We want them to be supported and feel safe to come forward and be part of a very important process in the Tasmanian community's healing - the commission of inquiry. We wholeheartedly support that process. We know that it was Ms Skeggs who had the courage to share her story. Fundamentally, that has driven the opportunity for the commission of inquiry to be available to victims/survivors in Tasmania.

The actions of those in this place have brought further trauma to Ms Skeggs and to many Tasmanians who have endured terrible things over many years. A simple apology for the behaviour of some ministers in this place does not seem too much to ask. You should be given every opportunity today, to say why if you are not willing to apologise. I urge you to apologise.

I urge the Government to support the suspension of standing orders, and support the debate on this important censure motion before us today. We do not bring this lightly to the House. It is a matter of significant importance, and it is time you did the right thing.

Mr SPEAKER - The question is that leave be granted for the suspension of standing orders.

The House divided -

AYES 9

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

NOES 10

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

PAIRS

Ms Finlay
Mr Winter

Mr Gutwein
Mr Tucker

Motion negatived.

QUESTIONS

Victim/Survivor - Call for Apology

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for JUSTICE, Ms ARCHER

[10.39 a.m.]

Tiffany Skeggs has responded again to your continued refusal to put an end to the harm your conduct is causing her. She said:

I do not for a second believe that it is appropriate for the Attorney-General to hold her current roles when she claims she supports victim survivors, yet is openly and publicly treating us this way.

This is not about politics. It is about real people. I am a real person. Victim survivors are real people and this Government, these Ministers, have caused real harm to us.

I fear, deeply fear, that the example they are setting currently will prevent further victims-survivors from speaking out in fear that this is what they will face.

A victim/survivor is telling you that she has been harmed by your behaviour, and that she believes your actions could deter other victims/survivors from speaking up in the future. Given your ongoing refusal to do the right thing, are you really the right person to be responsible for the commission of inquiry?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, in question time this week I went through my record as Attorney-General and my sincerity in setting up the commission of inquiry, and the incredible body of work done in relation to both the royal commission at a national level and now a commission of inquiry at a Tasmanian level.

As the Deputy Premier has said this morning, adding to the Premier, our side of the House, the entire Government, has unreservedly apologised through the Premier, without explanation or excuse. You cannot get a higher person in government to speak for his government than the Premier. I totally support the Premier's apology. It is genuine and was made on behalf of all of us in Government.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms ARCHER - The Premier made it very clear to the parliament that he was speaking on behalf of the Government, on behalf of his ministers. All members of our Government

support the Premier and his wholehearted apology. Every one of us acknowledges the incredible bravery of victims/survivors to disclose child sexual abuse.

Ms O'Connor - Are you sorry?

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Ms ARCHER - I am on record in this place, on so many occasions, speaking on this issue and speaking about the bravery, and my amazement at the bravery of victims/survivors. I never talk about personal experiences or anything, other than to say I have a very close connection with victims/survivors and their families. I wholeheartedly support them. I understand it is very distressing for all victims/survivors to come forward to the commission of inquiry but I encourage them to do so to avail themselves of the support we have set up for them to have while they go through this process. Indeed, it is also part of the process of the national redress scheme that they can access the support available to them.

That process, which I know all members of this House support, now needs to be able to take its course, independent of this place, or indeed our Government. As soon as we set up the commission of inquiry, the Government does not have any control over it, and rightly so. It is completely independent of government and the parliament. Its processes that we strengthened through the Commissions of Inquiry Act are unwavering. They have a higher authority than even a court of law. I urge the Leader of the Opposition not to interfere with that process, and members in this place need to respect that process and the supports available to victims/survivors.

Victims/Survivors - Confidence in Commission of Inquiry

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for JUSTICE, Ms ARCHER

[10.44 a.m.]

A growing number of victims/survivors are speaking out against what you have done or failed to do. Another victim/survivor of James Griffin has said:

We have zero confidence that our Government will help us put an end to this. Without our survivors constantly dragging our trauma into the spotlight, none of you would be listening to us because, as you have made it quite clear, you really do not care at all. For Elise Archer to say that it is an appalling question when asked if she will apologise is downright disrespectful. Do you know what is appalling, Ms Archer? Being sexually abused as a child. It is about time you all grew up and went out and found new jobs where people's lives weren't at stake, because that's what this is.

If victims/survivors have no confidence in you to oversee the commission of inquiry, how can anyone else?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, when I said that that was an appalling question I was referring to the line of questioning the Leader of the Opposition has been undertaking in this House over a three-week

period, and even longer than that with her sustained attacks on a number of Government ministers. That is what the context of that comment was.

I addressed the question just asked by the Labor Leader in my initial answer. There is no point repeating that. It is the same question that she asked of me, first of all. I have detailed my response to that and I do not have anything to add to that.

What the Leader of the Opposition asked me is the same question she asked me before and I was putting forward my answer to that question, and I repeat everything I said this morning.

COVID-19 - Lifting of Mask Mandate and Effect on Numbers

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for HEALTH, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.46 a.m.]

Another Tasmanian has died from COVID-19 overnight; may they rest in peace.

As of today, there are 2009 reported new cases. Just 48 hours after the mask mandate was lifted on 11 March reported COVID-19 case numbers doubled to over 1800. In response to this clear cause and effect, your colleague, Resources minister Guy Barnett, told Tasmanians: 'This slight uptick in case numbers ...' Narrator: 'It was a doubling of case numbers.' - '... is not related to the recent removal of masks'.

The Greens believe this was a blatant falsehood. Did Public Health tell you the doubling of reported cases within 48 hours after masks were removed had nothing to do with lifting those protections?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank Ms O'Connor, member for Clark, for her question, in which she acknowledged the passing of another person, a 94-year-old woman who was a resident of an aged care facility in the state's north and who sadly passed away. My thoughts and condolences are with this person's family, friends and loved ones.

Ms O'Connor, as the Premier has said many times in this place and publicly, there has been a very transparent approach that both he, our Health commander, Ms Morgan-Wicks and our Director of Public Health, Dr Mark Veitch, have taken in terms of their public presentation and their transparency when it comes to informing Tasmanians over a very long time now - it goes back to February-March 2020 -

Ms O'Connor - We want what to know what they said about the doubling of case numbers.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Mr ROCKLIFF - That is two years of intensity of decision making, the variables of the COVID-19 variants - to begin with Delta, Omicron and now BA.2, which we know is more transmissible but all the evidence would suggest no more lethal in its effect -

Ms O'Connor - How would we know? It's only been around a month.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. That is twice. The third time and you are out.

Mr ROCKLIFF - This has challenged the state and has challenged the nation. Indeed, it has been challenging across the globe. The Premier has said that he has been -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 45, relevance. You have given guidance before when there are a number of questions in the question that the minister has latitude. We asked a single question: did Public Health tell you the doubling of reported cases within 48 hours had nothing to do with the removal of the mask mandate?

Government members interjecting.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am entitled to take a point of order in silence.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'CONNOR - One question in the question: did Public Health tell the minister that the doubling of reported case numbers had nothing to do with the removal of masks?

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, I am sure the minister heard the question and he must be afforded the opportunity to answer the question in full without interjections and points of order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - The point I was making is that unlike other states, the Premier and the team at Public Health, who have done such a wonderful job, have been joined at the hip when it comes to our response to COVID-19.

Across our Tasmanian Health Service, the work done around vaccination, we still lead the nation in vaccination, particularly when it comes to our five- to 11-year-olds. We are consistently 10 per cent above the national average, although it has plateaued and we need to encourage parents and carers to get their children vaccinated because it is the number one protection and defence.

There have been various Public Health measures along the way, going from the extremities of lockdown to restrictions, including masks, which we are still complying with. It is a restriction within our place of work here today. We will always take the very best Public Health advice.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, standing order 45, relevance. The minister was asked one question. I implore you to ask him to answer it.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, as has been answered plenty of times in the past from Speakers long gone, there is leniency given to the member asking. There was a significant preamble to the question and the issue has been addressed by the minister. I cannot put words into the minister's mouth. You have a second opportunity today to ask another question if you wish.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you, Mr Speaker. It should be known as well that our restrictions have eased due to good, solid Public Health advice, which we have been guided by along the way. It should be noted that Tasmania has one of the lowest hospitalisation rates in the country.

We have managed the pandemic extraordinarily well, largely with tripartisan support across this parliament until recent times. The extremities of border closures and lockdowns, particularly -

Ms O'Connor interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, you are on thin ice.

Mr ROCKLIFF - in this neck of the woods, to the easing of restrictions given the mild nature of the Omicron variant, albeit more highly transmissible, and the BA.2 more highly transmissible than the Omicron when it first reached our shores late last year.

Mr SPEAKER - I ask the minister to wind up, please.

Mr ROCKLIFF - We have followed Public Health advice along the way. We have been one of the very few states to do so in lock step in terms of policy between the Premier and Public Health, and that will continue.

Remote Access to Parliament

Ms JOHNSTON question to MINISTER for FINANCE, Mr FERGUSON

[10.55 a.m.]

For the last two days I have sat at home following Public Health orders and watched on in utter frustration that I have been unable to participate and represent my constituents in the very important matters this House has been debating. The rest of the world, both private and public sector, including federal and other parliaments, and local government in this state have managed to allow people to participate in workplace activities remotely.

Given the high amount of COVID-19 currently circulating in Tasmania and that yesterday we had one Independent, two Government members, one Opposition member and one Greens member out - a fifth of this already small House - when will you bring this parliament into the 21st century and provide remote access to the business of this House?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, that does not fall to my responsibility as Leader of the House but I understand and respect the question. I will take it on notice on behalf of the Government but it would be a matter for the House itself and yourself, Mr Speaker, together with the Clerk, to provide that advice to the House. If I can be a conduit of any response in relation to that matter, I am happy to do that on behalf of, perhaps, the Speaker and the Clerk.

Victim/Survivor - Harm Caused by Conduct

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for JUSTICE, Ms ARCHER

[10.56 a.m.]

Last night I received one of the most moving letters I have received in a long time. It begins:

I am a victim/survivor of childhood sexual abuse and have been watching parliament for the past few weeks. Seeing the abhorrent response that Elise Archer and Michael Ferguson gave to you when you directly quoted a question from a victim/survivor shook me to my core.

I generally consider myself fully recovered and have been privileged to have led a full life. However, this display of utter disrespect and, worse, disregard for this brave woman's question took me immediately back to a place of hopelessness and despair.

What has unfolded since then has been surreal in the most horrific way imaginable. I have felt myself feeling those dark but vaguely familiar feelings I thought were behind me, feelings of helplessness, voicelessness and despair in the face of power and evil.

I do not deserve to risk harm to my mental health by tuning in to watch our leadership discuss such critically important matters. No member of the public does.

Can you not hear the harm your conduct is causing?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, as I have said already, I support the Premier's apology. Everyone from the Government supports the Premier and his apology. Of course, I am sorry for the impact this has had on Ms Skeggs and other victims/survivors. That is why I wholeheartedly support the Premier's apology. He did so on behalf of all of us.

Securing Tasmania's Future - Regional and Rural Health Initiatives

Mrs ALEXANDER question to MINISTER for HEALTH, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.58 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the Tasmanian Liberal Government investment in initiatives that support health services for those Tasmanians who live in regional and rural areas across the state, and how this is assisting them and securing Tasmania's future?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank Mrs Alexander for her question. The Tasmanian Government is committed to building a health system that provides Tasmanians with the right care in the right place at the right time, regardless of where they live in Tasmania.

Right now, we are investing in a number of community-based measures to improve health services and facilities, including in rural and remote areas, providing additional staffing, important infrastructure and equipment upgrades, and incentivising services to open more hours of the day. We have announced several statewide initiatives relating to enhanced community care and after-hours services that will benefit Tasmanians living in rural and remote areas. These include:

- \$27.5 million for the Community Rapid Response Service, a hospital-avoidance service that can treat people in the community with an acute illness, injury or pre-existing condition who would otherwise require a period of hospitalisation.
- \$26.7 million provided to increase staffing and upgrade equipment across our district hospitals. We are working with district hospital sites to develop a prioritised list of equipment.

The Government acknowledges the important role GPs and the primary healthcare sector play in caring for our community. While the federal government is predominantly responsible for funding GPs and primary care, the Tasmanian Government has been making a number of investments into community-based care to assist in reducing hospitalisation and to deliver better care for Tasmanians. These investments include the specialist rapid-response service, which provides GPs and other primary care providers with quick access to specialists from the Tasmanian Health Service.

We have also established the \$8 million After Hours Support Initiative to incentivise GPs and pharmacies to provide after-hours services for their local communities. Applications for round one of the After Hours Support Initiative sought proposals from GPs and pharmacies to operate extended after-hours for the local community. The successful applicants were:

- Sorell Family Practice
- Tasman Pharmacy
- Deloraine and Westbury Medical Centre
- Wilkinson's Pharmacy, Burnie
- Ochre Health Medical Centre, King Island
- Youngtown Pharmacy
- Lindisfarne Amcal Pharmacy
- North Hobart Pharmacy
- Terry White Chemmart Health Hub, Launceston

Round two of the initiative was extended to general practices and those primary care services to apply for grants to establish and operate urgent after-hours care services. The successful applicants were:

- Sorell Family Practice
- X-Ray Newstead
- Summerdale Medical Centre
- Launceston Medical Centre
- Your Doctor Hobart
- The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, which will use funding to incorporate an after-hours pharmacist's advice service into the existing GP Assist structure.

Total funding approved is approximately \$2.1 million, and the Department of Health will monitor the success of these initiatives over the next 12 months. This means more patients are getting better access to the health care they need outside of the hospital.

We have also committed to employing an additional 48 paramedics around the state, with 24 of these positions based in rural and regional areas. I am advised that 20 of these positions have already been filled, and the remaining positions are subject to active recruitment processes. Again, this will mean that Tasmanians will have access to timely care when they need it.

We have also invested some \$500 000 to provide another 180 defibrillators as part of the community defibrillator program. The first 90 of these devices are currently being delivered to successful applicants, including:

- Boat Harbour Beach Surf Life Saving Club
- Bruny Island District School
- George Town Neighbourhood House
- Meals on Wheels, Huonville
- New Town Croquet Club

Another round of this community fund will commence in the middle of the year, and I encourage all community sporting organisations who would like to have one of these devices, to apply within their local area.

Through our Healthcare Future reforms and the community investments we are currently delivering on, the Tasmanian Government will continue to make positive change to support the provision of more care in the community closer to people's homes. We are focused on building a better health system and securing Tasmania's future.

Victim/Survivor - Call for Apology

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for FINANCE, Mr FERGUSON

[11.03.45]

Tiffany Skeggs has said that the ongoing lack of an apology from you made her feel minimised and was adding to the trauma of the situation. This morning, your colleagues, the Deputy Premier, Mr Rockliff and Minister for Justice, Ms Archer have said sorry. Will you now do the same?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I am sorry for the impact of Government members and my reaction on the day. The Premier has already apologised. I associate myself with that. I repeat it. We have always endeavoured, as I have, to respond sensitively, fairly and honestly when this matter has come to my attention. I spoke about this earlier this week in the House and I associated myself with the Premier's apology, which he gave on behalf of all of his team, of which I am a member.

I also made it clear that I hope that it would be seen as acceptable to anyone, not just Ms Skeggs but anyone else who was troubled or offended by the audible response that came from our side of the House, I repeat, I am sorry for the impact that has had on Ms Skeggs.

We are all responsible for the way we conduct ourselves in this House. The Government has a very strong position on supporting people going through trauma, particularly in relation to child sexual abuse. Few of us understand the reality. Those of us who want to be supportive search for ways to do that. One of the ways we are doing that is through the great work of the Government, led by the Attorney-General. That work has been pioneering a whole range of important - many would say, overdue - reforms that have come to this House. Those reforms are not only to look after people recovering from abuse and trauma, but also to prevent it.

I continue to be steadfast in my position that we must have stronger sentencing for perpetrators of sexual assault, particularly affecting children. Like the Premier, and every other member of this House, I am sorry for the impact this had had for survivors of sexual assault. That is why I wholeheartedly support the Premier's apology, which was made in good faith on behalf of the Liberal Party.

Bass Highway and Midland Highway - Infrastructure

Mr ELLIS question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr FERGUSON

[11.06 a.m.]

Can you please update the House of the latest developments on the Bass Highway west of Wynyard, as well as the \$565 million Midland Highway Action Plan, and how this is transforming our critical north-south link.

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Braddon, Mr Ellis, for his question but also for his fantastic work supporting me and the Government in looking after our highway infrastructure and pushing for much needed upgrades. Like Mr Ellis, I am very familiar with the Bass Highway, with my own birthplace being Burnie, my home being Launceston, and my ancestral home being Circular Head. Over the summer period I drove every metre of the Bass Highway, and I was very pleased to see road construction in full swing,

Its timely to bring the House up-to-date on the latest infrastructure projects under way around the state - remembering that in 2021 we spent \$317 million on delivery of infrastructure. That is the highest in the state's history.

On the north-west, the Bass Highway is undergoing a transformation, particularly west of Wynyard, where we are seeing \$100 million of projects under way. Next month, works will be completed on the junction of Gates Road and Dallas Road, with the overtaking lane incorporated on the eastbound lane at Rocky Cape, a very important safety treatment there as well.

The Mella Road and Myalla Road junction improvements will be completed, with dual overtaking lanes established at Monateric Road at Wiltshire. A number of projects to improve safety and efficiency have now been completed at Brittons Swamp and Togari, and also near Boat Harbour Primary School.

I am pleased to inform the House that a \$9 million contract has just been awarded to VEC Civil Engineering, a proud Tasmanian company, to upgrade the highway at Table Cape, to improve the curves and create wide shoulders to enhance safety for cyclists and other road users, as well as improve the junction with Tollymore Rd. This has been long awaited, and I know that members for Braddon, particularly you, Mr Ellis, will be very keen to share the news with the community. There are more projects still to come on the Bass Highway.

In May 2015, the new Australian and Tasmanian Governments, launched the Midland Highway 10-year action plan, a \$565 million investment in our key north-south link. All up, more than \$405 million has been invested on the Midland Highway since 2015 and I encourage members opposite to acknowledge that and enjoy the improvement as well.

I am also pleased to advise the House that earlier this month 103 kilometres of the 150 kilometres is completed. The final stages comprise three major projects, first at Ross, Lonnavele to Campbell Town and second, the Oatlands section, Lower Marsh to north of Oatlands. Work on these two projects has now started. It started last month and I am advised that both stages should be completed in 2024-25. Works will begin on the third and final section from Campbell Town north to Epping Forest in the middle of this year and also be completed in the summer of 2024-25.

I mentioned already the flexible wire rope barrier; that is about preventing head-on collisions. That, together with our widening and wider shoulders and longer sightlines and better curve management, is allowing more and more of that highway to be accredited to AusRAP 3-star recognition, which is a way of demonstrating that we are improving the safety of that highway, which for many years people have seen as very dangerous.

The record shows that last year the Liberal Government spent 245 per cent more on its roads and bridges programs than when Labor was last in office with the Greens, which was \$317 million under Liberal compared to \$129 million under Labor-Greens. There is more to come.

Later today I will be making a special announcement about an opening of important infrastructure at Kingborough, a new investment that will reduce commuter pressure on the Southern Outlet, as well as my great goal of incentivising and improving public transport.

COVID-19 - Public Health Advice on Lifting of Mask Mandates

Ms O'CONNOR question to MINISTER for HEALTH, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.12 a.m.]

Did Public Health tell you the doubling of reported cases within 48 hours after masks were removed had nothing to do with lifting those protections?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank Ms O'Connor. Ms O'Connor, I understand your advocacy around masks, despite the reduction of restrictions and mask mandates. Of course Tasmanians can be encouraged to wear masks freely if they see fit. I often wear a mask in settings that no longer have the mandates. What is important here is to recognise how well Tasmania has done when it comes to the pandemic -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 45, relevance. We are not here to hear how well Tasmania has done. There are 75 000 infected Tasmanians so far. I asked one question. One question.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, I have heard the point of order. The fact that you ask a short question does not mean that the answer necessarily has to be short. The minister is allowed to answer it in the best way he sees fit. As I mentioned the day before yesterday, provided that the minister is maintaining the policy direction of the question then he is relevant. I ask the minister to stay relevant to the question but answer it as he sees fit.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Thank you. I believe the subject of masks is relevant to the fact that I am answering the question. When it comes to reducing or easing the restrictions regarding masks, Ms O'Connor, other states were ahead of us -

Ms O'Connor - That's not what I asked.

Mr ROCKLIFF - in that sense. On 11 March we announced, in line with the Public Health direction, once again, that masks were no longer required in most indoor settings and workplaces. This meant they were no longer required in retail settings, at most workplaces, hospitality venues and events.

Ms O'Connor - Why can't you answer the question?

Mr ROCKLIFF - Masks are an affordable and accessible method to help minimise the transmission of COVID-19 in the community and are still strongly recommended if you cannot physically distance, if you work in a public-facing role, are vulnerable, or will be near someone vulnerable to COVID-19.

Ms O'Connor - Have you told your Liberal staffers that?

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. I have warned you a number of times today. Please, you have asked the question. Allow the minister to answer it. Another interjection and you will not be here for the rest of question time.

Mr ROCKLIFF - Ms O'Connor, no one is forcing people to take off their masks. In many cases they are recommended, of course, if you are in and around vulnerable settings, cannot physically distance, or are close to vulnerable people, or are vulnerable to COVID-19.

I want to highlight the fact that Tasmania has one of the lowest rates per capita of COVID-19 hospitalisations, and currently has the lowest rate of ICU admissions, compared to other states and territories. In fact, as at 23 March of the 28 people in hospital, only nine are being treated specifically for COVID-19 and there are apparently no patients in ICU for COVID-19.

I commend the people who have worked so hard on the COVID@home program, as well - and I am mindful of time. The COVID@home program and our high vaccination rates are significant contributors to Tasmania having one of the lowest rates of hospitalisation admissions. As of 15 March, the COVID@home program has supported over 6000 people who are COVID-positive cases to safely recover at home since its inception. Today, I am advised that COVID@home has hit a new record of virtually providing care and monitoring to 1037 patients in their home. That is an incredible achievement. It has worked very well within our preparedness and eased pressure on our hospitals, which I know was the focus of not only our policymakers, our Public Health team and our Health commander, but of course our entire Government as well.

I commend all those people across government and the community who have worked so hard with respect to our COVID-19 or our pandemic response. The people who work within our call centres have taken an extraordinarily large number of calls supporting people who, quite rightly, would be at an anxious time in their lives when it comes to testing positive, or concerned about testing positive with respect to COVID-19.

I thank Ms O'Connor for the question but I reiterate the very close association with the Premier and Public Health in terms of the measures we have put in place and reinforce the fact that while we are easing mask restrictions and are one of the last states to do so, no-one is forcing people not to wear masks, particularly when it comes to people who are unable to physically distance or are in and around people who are vulnerable to COVID-19.

Victim/Survivor - Call for Apology - Impact on Mental Health and Wellbeing

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for MENTAL HEALTH and WELLBEING, Mr ROCKLIFF

[11.18 a.m.]

Victims/survivors are telling you and others in great detail the significant impact this shameful episode is having on their wellbeing. Professionals working in the field are explaining how inappropriate the conduct of the two ministers in question has been. As the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing and a former Lifeline counsellor, I have little doubt you can recognise the substantial harm that has been caused to victims/survivors across Tasmania. How are you going to repair the damage your Government has done and will you commit to requiring all Government members to undertake trauma-informed education and training?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question. Every Government member, Ms White, recognises the trauma associated with the horrific, harrowing experiences of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse - everyone within Government and no doubt I speak for everyone in this parliament as well.

That is why this Government has set up the commission of inquiry, capably led by our Attorney-General, who worked with me very closely leading up to the announcement in August 2020 when we held our Department of Education inquiry into historical sexual abuse going over many decades. We did that because there were a growing number of victims/survivors of child sexual abuse within our education system whose voice needed to be heard and who wanted justice. They wanted to ensure that no stone was left unturned when it comes to the processes that we have in place to ensure that within our education system, and now the commission of inquiry, we look across government to ensure that we never put the young people in our care, in state care, in such a high level of vulnerability. It has traumatised far too many people for life.

Our Government, and every single member of our team, is committed to seeing the commission of inquiry through. We would not have started the inquiry if we did not want to see very strong recommendations, which we will support -

Ms WHITE - Point of order, Mr Speaker, standing order 45, relevance. The question was whether the Deputy Premier and minister for Mental Health required ministers in the Government to undertake trauma-informed education and awareness training, not about the commission of inquiry.

Mr SPEAKER - The point of order is taken but, as you know, I cannot indicate to the minister how he should answer the question. The minister can answer the question how he sees most appropriate without interjection.

Mr ROCKLIFF - As I have said this morning, we all support the Premier's apology. I am sorry for the impact that this has had on Ms Skeggs and other victims/survivors of sexual abuse. I wholeheartedly support the Premier's apology on behalf of us all.

I encourage every member of parliament to inform themselves about the impact of trauma. I committed last year, at the Alcohol and Drug Services AGM, to undertake stigma training, which I have not completed but it is my intention to do so. I need to do that before the next AGM because I committed to do that. I encourage everyone to inform themselves of the impact of trauma.

Ms White - You are the minister for Wellbeing. You could lead this.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I am the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing and I am encouraging all members of parliament to educate themselves about the impact and be trauma-aware. I was not fully appreciative of the impact of trauma on people's learning, as a severe barrier to learning, when I was education minister. That is why we are committed and as part of the bilateral agreement -

Ms White - What about their recovery because of your ministers' behaviour?

Mr ROCKLIFF - This is important, Ms White; because we all get an understanding and we are all educated every single day in this job. We are presented with people who require our support because they often have nowhere else to go. Through that support, we educate ourselves to the circumstances that people find themselves in, through no fault of their own. Every member of parliament, our team I know for sure, is committed to informing themselves, educating themselves so they are able to support people who come into our offices, write us emails or send us messages on Facebook, often in distress.

The point I was making is that I was not fully aware of the barriers to education that trauma had on young people. This is why we committed, as a state government, with the support of our team, to include trauma-informed practice and the investment in our bilateral agreement with the state Government specifically so we can not only reduce the barriers to education for people with disability but also those impacted by trauma, which is a key barrier to learning.

Mr SPEAKER - Minister, would you please wind up.

Mr ROCKLIFF - I encourage every member of this parliament to inform themselves not only on the matter of trauma but other areas that we could educate ourselves on as well.

Securing Tasmania's Future - Farming Confidence and Water Initiatives

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

[11.26 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the Tasmanian Liberal Government is supporting farming confidence and the delivery of water initiatives across the state, delivering our plan to secure Tasmania's future? Are you aware of any other approaches?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for her question and keen interest in this matter. It was great to stand with the member for Bass just a few weeks ago at the launch of the Tamar Irrigation Scheme, and the preferred design for the Tamar region, and look at the confidence in the faces of the farmers as a result of that announcement. We are getting on with the job and we do have that strong plan to secure Tasmania's future. We have perhaps the most comprehensive and visionary agricultural plans and policies in the state's history to accelerate agriculture in Tasmania to support sustainable growth and productivity, and to create more jobs.

We have just hit a record-breaking production, exceeding \$2 billion - a 13 per cent increase in the 2019-20 year, compared to a 0.4 per cent increase for Australia. Congratulations, well done, Tassie. We are on track to get to that \$10 billion farmgate value by 2050.

I draw the attention of the House to the latest Rabobank Rural Confidence Survey. It said that Tasmanian farmers are equal with Queensland as the most confident and optimistic in

the country. Once again, Tassie farmers are coming out on top, having the highest levels in Australia. This latest survey was taken before the devastating and saddening floods in Queensland and New South Wales. What does it mean? It means that their vision and their confidence is that they will be 40 per cent better off, expecting conditions will improve, and 50 per cent will be same. That is fantastic. At least a good part of that is because we are backing our farmers and agricultural policies, and delivering jobs in our rural and regional communities.

Tuesday was World Water Day and we all know about water. Water is?

Government members - Liquid gold.

Mr BARNETT - It is liquid gold and we are delivering on the liquid gold because it is going to deliver unprecedented growth throughout Tasmania. We are talking about the high-value crops, the increased rotations and increased yields. We are talking about wine grapes, leafy greens. It could be lettuces, brussels sprouts, broccoli, carrots, potatoes and berries - strawberries, raspberries, blueberries.

We are on the march in Tasmania thanks to investment of this Government, and past governments, in irrigation: fifteen irrigation schemes, including the Greater Meander Valley Irrigation Scheme, which is the envy of the nation. I thank the federal member for Braddon, Gavin Pearce, and Bridget Archer. I thank Susie Bower, who is a very strong advocate for the people of Lyons.

We have six projects now in Tranche 3: Don, Wesley Vale, Sassafras, Northern Midlands and Tamar. We have plans for the south-east Southern Midlands. What does that all add up to over the next five years? This is the vision outlined by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, in his state of the state address, including 140 000 megalitres of high-surety irrigation water to Tasmanian agriculture; more than a billion-dollar increase in the state's agricultural sector; and more than \$450 million extra in on-farm investment. All those projects together make an estimated cost of more than \$1.5 billion over that estimated five-year period. That means an estimated 3500 new jobs in Tasmania in those rural and regional areas. We are on the march and we have more funding for river health, for sustainability, for rural water use strategy and our rural water roundtable. We want to use the water wisely.

I was asked about alternatives. Well, Labor is all hat, no cattle -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 48. I heard you a minute and a half ago ask the minister to wind up. He is now over four minutes and he is about to lob into the Opposition again.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, I am not sure what you were listening to but I have not asked the minister to wind up yet. I do not know what you heard but it was not that.

Mr BARNETT - Thank you, Mr Speaker. Labor is all hat, no cattle, all shouting, no policy, no vision, no plan. They know it and they are murmuring in support.

We know the productive industries such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and agriculture.

Today I can advise that there is a workplace invasion at Sustainable Timber Tasmania, and that is just another reason the Opposition should come on board and support our workplace

protection legislation. People should have the right to go to work and a business should have the right to operate, free from intrusion, free from radical protesters. Enough is enough. I am putting on the record that there will be another opportunity, and we look forward to delivering on that opportunity. We need improvements on our workplace protection laws.

Marinus Link - Australian Government Agreement

Mr WINTER question to MINISTER for ENERGY and EMISSIONS REDUCTION, Mr BARNETT

[11.32 a.m.]

I regret asking this question because it means I have to listen to more of this. Can you confirm the Tasmanian Government has been offered an agreement for the Marinus Link by the Australian Government, and did the Tasmanian Government reject it?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I could not be more pleased to speak about our renewable energy plans for Tasmania and to speak in support of Marinus Link, Battery of the Nation and our plans for green hydrogen. It is all on the march and we are heading in the right direction. There is a lot to talk about. We are talking about billions of dollars' worth of investment, thousands of jobs, downward pressure on electricity prices and a cleaner world.

I can confirm that we have been working very closely with the Australian Government with respect to Marinus Link, Battery of the Nation and green hydrogen. There have been discussions in recent times about all of those things and those important projects are moving forward. These conversations are positive on both sides and are in the final stages. We look forward to further advice and feedback from the Australian Government in that regard.

As a government in Tasmania we will represent the views of the Tasmanian people and do what is best for Tasmania. We will be delivering jobs, investment, opportunity, and a cleaner world.

Mr Winter - Do you have an offer?

Mr SPEAKER - Order, member for Franklin.

Mr WINTER - Point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 45, relevance. It is a one-line question: does the Tasmanian Government have an offer from the Australian Government in relation to Marinus?

Mr SPEAKER - You can make the point of order and I will ask the minister to stay relevant to the question. As I have indicated before, provided that the minister is dealing with the question then it is relevant. I am sick and tired of members making points of order to re-ask a question. I am sure it is a tactic to interrupt the minister but you are put on notice.

Ms O'CONNOR - On the point of order, Mr Speaker, just so it is really clear, the reason other members take points of order is because ministers are not answering questions.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, that is not a point of order.

Mr BARNETT - Mr Speaker, I am very pleased to advise that Marinus Link is progressing very positively, heading to FID 2024 design and approval process in accordance with our plans. It is backed in by the state Government and the federal government. I thank the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, and Angus Taylor, for their strong support. I thank Gavin Pearce, Bridget Archer and Susie Bower. She is the federal Liberal candidate and has been advocating for this for some time.

Mr WINTER - Point of order, Mr Speaker. The minister is now talking about Susie Bower, a Liberal candidate. That is not relevant to the question. Under standing order 45 you should ask him to be relevant to the question that was asked.

Mr SPEAKER - I will repeat myself. There is a significant amount of leniency given when asking a question. Just because you ask a short question does not mean that the minister has to answer in a few seconds. The minister has the call. You have made the point of order. I have asked the minister to stay relevant. The call is back to the minister.

Mr WINTER - With respect, Mr Speaker, I dissent from your ruling.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. Mr Winter, if you could just take your seat, please; I am on my feet. I am trying to make sense of your dissent. I have indicated to you that I have indicated to the minister to stay relevant. The point of order was under standing order 45 which is relevance. I made the comment to the minister to stay relevant. What are you dissenting on?

Mr WINTER - My understanding of your ruling was that you said it was not a point of order.

Mr SPEAKER - No.

Mr WINTER - Are you ruling that my point of order was valid?

Mr SPEAKER - I have had enough of this. There was a point of order on relevance. I have asked the minister to stay relevant. That is where we are at. Previously I indicated that standing to re-ask the question was not part of the relevance point of order. This time I have asked the minister to stay relevant.

Mr WINTER - I still do not know what your ruling was, Mr Speaker. Did you rule in favour of my point of order, or did you reject the point of order?

Mr SPEAKER - I have ruled that the minister stay relevant. Minister, you have the call.

Mr BARNETT - Thanks very much, Mr Speaker. Clearly the question was about Marinus Link, the progress of Marinus Link, and there are different parts to that question. To be very clear, it is progressing very positively. I am very grateful for the collaboration and positive support that we have received from the Australian Government and we are on track. They have big plans for Tasmania. Of course, under our Government, what has happened? Prices have come down, down, down. What happened under Labor? When you were in government they went up, up, up.

Tamar Valley Power Station - Gas Supply Agreement

Mr WINTER question to MINISTER for ENERGY and EMISSIONS REDUCTION, Mr BARNETT

[11.39 a.m.]

Can you confirm that because of your botched handling of the Tamar Valley Power Station gas supply agreement, gas transportation costs have gone up, up, up for major industrial users by over 25 per cent?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member very much for the question. This is the shadow minister who was crying wolf last year and telling this Government to intervene in a commercial process. He was calling on the Government to intervene in the process. The process took its course and a mutually agreeable outcome was achieved. This member across the Chamber is 'Chicken Little'. He said the sky would fall in. Guess what has happened? The sky has not fallen in. You know that the details of that agreement between Hydro Tasmania and the Tasmanian Gas Pipeline are commercial in-confidence. I can say that we have had further discussions with Tasmanian Gas Pipeline and they have thanked me for supporting the gas industry in Tasmania. They have confidence in our Government.

I am not sure where you are coming from but we know you have a track record. You are still on your training wheels and you have not quite got there. We are developing a future gas strategy and we are working with all the key stakeholders. I have made it clear that gas is a key part of our energy future. Our energy security is not at risk. The question from Mr Winter is really an embarrassing 'Chicken Little' event. Last year he was convinced that the sky would fall in and everything would go belly-up. Guess what? He has muffed it.

We are very confident and pleased to be working with all the key stakeholders. It is very important in terms of major industry, manufacturing and growing our economy, not just on the north-west coast and in the north, but around the state. It has an important role to play. We will continue to play our role, unlike Labor which has a track record of putting prices up when they were in government. A process took place and the outcome is mutually agreeable.

Ticket To Play Voucher Program

Mr ELLIS question MINISTER for SPORT and RECREATION, Mr STREET

[11.42 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the Tasmanian majority Liberal government's plan to get more Tasmanian children active in sport by breaking down financial barriers to participation?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, I thank the member for Braddon for his question. The Tasmanian Liberal Government is working to get more young Tasmanians moving into sport. I have consistently said in this place that one of my key priorities as the Minister for Sport and Recreation is

increasing participation at the grassroots and community level. One important way we are doing this is through our Ticket To Play voucher program. This vital program reduces the cost of participation in sport by providing eligible children, aged from five to 18 years with two \$100 vouchers for use for registration costs. These vouchers provide assistance for families who may struggle with the costs associated with joining a sporting club.

Today, I am very pleased to update the House that we are about to exceed 12 000 vouchers that have been issued under the program for 2021-22. That means that thousands of young Tasmanians who may not have had the opportunity to take up sport due to financial barriers have been able to do so. I am extremely proud of this, as every young Tasmanian deserves to lead a healthy and active lifestyle.

The Tasmanian Government established Ticket To Play, Tasmania's first sports voucher program, in 2018. After seeing how it was benefiting families and communities, we committed \$1 million per year in 2020 to extend the program for another four years. In 2021 our Government doubled funding for the program, which allowed eligible participants to receive two \$100 vouchers. Importantly, the two vouchers can be used at two different activity providers, meaning a young Tasmanian has the opportunity to try two different sports and in doing so, experience the social and community benefits that come with being connected to a sporting club.

Since October 2021 the Ticket To Play voucher program has also been extended to include eligible learn to swim providers, with 16 registered swim centres now active in the program. Swimming is one of our most popular organised physical activities for children, but swimming lessons can be expensive, especially for families with several children. The expanded Ticket To Play voucher program will make swimming lessons more affordable, and help more children safely enjoy being active in the water. I am sure we can all agree that as an island state, this is particularly important.

The response to Ticket to Play from the community and activity providers has been overwhelmingly positive.

Jodi Harrison from Swim Central in New Town, recently wrote to the Department of Communities Tasmania, stating:

Ticket to Play is a game changer for children who might normally miss out on swimming due to financial stress. The availability of funding for a life- saving skill like swimming for these kids is a real blessing.

Jodi went on say that she had a parent come in and use her Ticket to Play vouchers for her two children, and the parent said:

I am so grateful for this, I don't think we could afford the regular lessons without it.

Tracy Canham, from Little Athletics Tasmania, said:

The Tasmanian Government's Ticket to Play program has assisted hundreds of children to participate in Little Athletics this past season. Despite the challenges COVID-19 has presented us with over the past two seasons,

membership in Little Athletics centres across Tasmania has actually increased, thanks largely to the Ticket to Play program which supports families who would otherwise struggle ...

Processing the vouchers has been an easy process, with our organisation reimbursed for vouchers claimed each weekend on a weekly basis.

The staff at Community Sport and Recreation are incredibly helpful with both us as a sporting body and to our members who contact them with enquiries.

Finally, Dean Jackson from the Southern Tasmanian Netball Association said that he was certain that Ticket to Play has allowed some people to play in their competitions that would otherwise have been unable to do so.

It is vital that kids can play team sports to learn about camaraderie, teamwork and feel like they are part of something. While the program may well help to create some sporting stars of the future, its true purpose is to show young Tasmanians the benefits of leading an active and healthy lifestyle. Every young Tasmanian deserves to lead an active and healthy lifestyle, and as a Government we will do everything we can to encourage and support them to achieve this.

Time expired.

RESPONSES TO PETITIONS

Glamorgan Spring Bay Municipality - Rating System 2021-22

Mr Ferguson tabled the responses to petitions presented by **Mr Tucker** on 28 October 2021:

- Petition No. 15 - See Appendix 1 on page 98.
- Petition No. 16 - See Appendix 2 on page 100.

Mr Ferguson tabled the response to petition a presented by **Ms Butler** on 28 October 2021:

- Petition No. 17 - See Appendix 3 on page 102.

TREASURY MISCELLANEOUS (AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT) BILL 2022 (No. 7) STADIUMS TASMANIA BILL 2021 (No. 48)

Bills agreed to by the Legislative Council without amendment.

**EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENTS (EDUCATION REGULATION)
BILL 2021 (No. 53)**

Bill agreed to by the Legislative Council with amendment.

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the message be taken into consideration at a later hour.

I indicate to members to expect that we will call on that Order of the Day in between the Land Tax Bill and the Climate Change Bill.

Motion agreed to.

SITTING DATES

[11.50 a.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House)(by leave) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House at its rising adjourn until Tuesday 12 April next at 10 a.m.

Motion agreed to.

MOTION

Leave to Move Motion without Notice - Motion Negatived

[11.51 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move -

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended to debate the following
censure motion:

That this House censure the Minister for Resources and member for Lyons,
Mr Barnett, for being dishonest with the Tasmanian people about a doubling
of reported COVID case numbers having nothing to do with the removal of
mask protections in the 10 days prior to his false statement.

Mr Speaker, this is a very, very serious matter. Around 75 000 Tasmanians have been infected with the coronavirus. We have almost 10 500 active cases. Overnight, 2009 new reported cases were recorded. We know that this minister lied. How do we know he lied?

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor, you will withdraw the comment.

Ms O'CONNOR - When I am moving censure I believe I can say that.

Mr Ferguson - You are not moving censure. You are moving to seek of leave. Please withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, you will withdraw the comment. Only when you are talking about the substantive motion can you make that accusation. At the moment, you are arguing for the seeking of leave.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am seeking leave because we know that the minister was dishonest.

Mr FERGUSON - Point of order, Mr Speaker, that is unparliamentary language. I ask you to have the member withdraw that.

Ms O'CONNOR - Okay, I withdraw the word 'lied' and insert 'dishonest'.

Mr Speaker, it is clear that Mr Barnett was dishonest with the Tasmanian people because the Greens this morning gave the Minister for Health two opportunities to back in Mr Barnett, who falsely stated to the Tasmanian people on 11 March - 10 days after the first mask restriction protections were lifted and within 48 hours after masks were all but removed completely - first of all, that there had been a slight uptick in cases when in fact case numbers had gone from around 900 to 1800-plus within 48 hours. He called it 'a slight uptick' and then falsely told the people of Tasmania that very dramatic and sudden increase in reported case numbers had nothing to do with the removal of masks.

Let the House be reminded that we gave the Premier an opportunity to table Public Health advice that said it was safe to remove masks and the Government blocked that attempt. Twice this morning we asked the Minister for Health if minister Barnett's statement to the Tasmanian people was backed by Public Health advice. Twice he did not answer the question.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, again, you are on seeking of leave at this point in time. Please argue your seeking of leave.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is an urgent matter because overnight we had another preventable death from COVID-19. So far this year, 16 Tasmanians have died from COVID-19; all of them premature deaths and none of them mild deaths.

A minister of the Crown, when they receive their seal from the Governor on behalf of Her Majesty, is described as 'trustworthy and well-beloved'. This minister is not trustworthy because he told a blatant untruth to the people of Tasmania that endangered them, because what it said was, 'Don't worry about the masks, nothing to see here'. This is all because of a new subvariant which we know was first reported in Europe in mid-February and was on the mainland about 10 days before it was first reported here.

The second important thing to remember, which paints minister Barnett's statement as a complete untruth, is that the State of Tasmania is not doing comprehensive genomic sequences of variants or subvariants of coronavirus, so it is impossible for him to have said that with any evidence behind him. This is gaslighting of the worst sort. A minister of the Crown should be held accountable for being dishonest with the people of Tasmania when you are dealing with a potentially deadly and disabling virus.

On the urgency of this matter, Professor Adrian Esterman, the chair of biostatistics and epidemiology at the University of South Australia, has said that removing Public Health measures in Tasmania:

... will accelerate the increase in numbers even further. In the middle of an epidemic when case numbers are going up you increase Public Health measures, you do not take them off.

Further - and this is detailed in the letter to you, Mr Speaker, and the President of the upper House, to which we have not received a response - Professor Nancy Baxter, clinical epidemiologist, said on the ABC:

Your not being personally responsible increases my risk. There is nothing that I can do that will totally protect me if I want to go out and about. Even wearing a mask, there is still a risk that I get COVID. If we all wear masks, we all protect each other. If you only have one person wearing a mask, it increases the mask-wearer's risk of getting COVID.

We are well accustomed in this place to having ministers not be trusty and well-beloved. We are well accustomed to deceit and obfuscation, but this is next level when you have a minister in the Gutwein Government telling a patent falsehood to the people of Tasmania while there is raging community transmission of a virus. This Government has decided to let rip this virus, which causes significant long-term health consequences in about 40 per cent of people who contract it, even when they only have a mild case.

We cannot let a minister of the Crown get away with this rubbish. It is a matter of life or death. The House should censure Mr Barnett for being thoroughly and dangerously dishonest with the people of Tasmania. It is not like one of his usual deceptions. It is a matter of life and death. I move that the House censure him.

Time expired.

[11.58 a.m.]

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, I am surprised that the minister who is the subject of this censure motion is not here for the seeking of leave debate, because it is about him. We will be supporting the seeking of leave.

Matters like this are important to be heard. I am interested in hearing the arguments about the reasons for the censuring of the Minister for Resources. They are important arguments to be heard as a part of debate. That is why the seeking of leave will be supported by Labor, so that we can listen to both the contribution we can expect to hear from the member for Clark, Ms O'Connor, but also from the Government in response.

I listened very carefully in question time today to the questions that were put to the Minister for Health and Deputy Premier, who was asked about whether the statements made by Mr Barnett were supported by Public Health advice. I did not hear a clear answer to those questions from the Minister for Health. In fact, the question was quite to the point as to whether the minister could provide that Public Health advice, but the answer was not forthcoming. I believe that is a problem in that it undermines broader confidence in the decisions the Government is taking on how it manages COVID-19 if they are not willing to be transparent about the advice they are relying upon.

As we know, public education around COVID-19 has been quite poor from this Government, and the necessity for the Government to provide transparent information,

particularly the public health advice it is relying on, to the community is essential for the community to have confidence in the leadership of this Government in its management of COVID-19.

Our question - and the reason we support the seeking of leave - is whether Public Health advice supports the comments made by Mr Guy Barnett; was the refusal to share that information today by the Minister for Health an attempt to protect Mr Guy Barnett; or is there no such information that exists? It is not clear, because the Government has not been clear, and that is why the matter needs to be resolved. For us, it is not just about Mr Barnett, it is about the Government's handling of COVID-19 and their communication to the community about the easing of certain restrictions, and on what advice those decisions are based. It is in everyone's interest that this is provided in a clear and transparent way.

Mr Speaker, we will be supporting the seeking of leave. This is a debate that needs to be had in a transparent and open way. The parliament is the best place to have it, so that we can share the evidence - hopefully from the Government - to justify the decisions that have been taken and to provide the Public Health advice they have relied on when ministers of the Crown have made statements. If that is not forthcoming, we can only assume it was made without Public Health advice - and that is terrible, because we are relying on the Government to make good decisions on behalf of our entire community to keep us safe.

If they are making decisions without the advice of Public Health, that is contrary to everything that we, in this parliament, have supported the Government on when it comes to managing COVID-19. For us, this is not just about Mr Barnett - it is more to do with the Government's management of COVID-19.

[12.01 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, the Government does not support another attempt to upend the business of the House for the day. Ms O'Connor has got herself into a bother on this, and Ms White is seeking out the politics. I imagine the Labor Party would not mind an opportunity to spend a few hours whacking minister Barnett. It is pretty ordinary. I do not profess to have the width, breadth, and depth of the Public Health advice. That is not my role.

However, Ms O'Connor has highlighted that she is unhappy with something minister Barnett said on 13 March, if I have the right date. She has a grievance with that, and has left it until the last day of the sitting to ask the Minister for Health a question about it. She could have asked earlier in the week. I do not think you took that opportunity. We had private members' time yesterday, and if it was so important Ms O'Connor could have raised it then. However, Ms O'Connor has done this today because she wants to have a go at minister Barnett. She does not like him. That is what it is.

The Greens are exposed on this, and, so is the Labor Party. The Greens have not only publicly come out against independently formed Public Health advice but it questions the integrity of our trusted experts, people like Dr Mark Veitch. He is highly respected in the Tasmanian community. The more that Tasmanians have come to know him, the more respected he has become, in my view. It has become worse than that, because the Greens are responsible - and I will say in advance, I will not withdraw if I am asked to do so because I am offending Ms O'Connor - the Greens have been recklessly spreading fear and misinformation.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - That is a fact, and the twitter feed on it from the Greens is revolting. They have been saying terrible things, and it is quite unguided, unmeasured, and it is very unhelpful. If vulnerable people are reading the garbage that Ms O'Connor is putting out there, it is only going to cause alarm and distress to people. This is another blatant attack on public health.

Mr SPEAKER - Leader of the House, we are talking about seeking of leave and not about the substantive motion: to be fair and to warn everyone.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Ferguson has falsely accused me of attacking Public Health. This is about Mr Barnett and his dishonesty.

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

Mr FERGUSON - It is a blatant attack on Public Health and it is part of a pattern from Ms O'Connor. Public Health is frequently on the record in Tasmania explaining their advice unfiltered, directly to the Tasmanian community via the media and via streaming platforms so people are able to observe it. I am explaining why this is not an urgent motion, because what Ms O'Connor is trying to do is crack a political win on a Thursday, because Ms O'Connor wants relevance. I am not the health minister. I am advised that the Public Health advice as publicly reiterated by Dr Veitch on Friday, 18 March at the COVID-19 update and by Dr Julie Graham, more recently on ABC radio, is that the surge in cases is due to the more virulent BA.2 variant. That is the advice that I have been given.

That was five days after the interview that upset Ms O'Connor so much. Again, it is a blatant attack on Public Health -

Ms O'Connor - No it is not.

Mr FERGUSON - and this motion cannot be brought forward to up-end the day's business when all it is is a political attack.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker. Please ask the minister to withdraw that. It is not an attack on Public Health. It is an attempt to censure a dishonest minister. I take offence.

Mr Ferguson - It is a debate.

Mr SPEAKER - You can wish to make a personal statement at a point in time, but the minister has an opportunity to express a view of what people say and what that actually means. The minister should continue but stick to the relevance of the motion and that is why this is not important to you.

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker. I took personal offence and asked the minister to withdraw the accusation that I am attacking Public Health. I ask you to ask him to withdraw, as you have to any other number of members any other number of times.

Mr SPEAKER - The member has taken personal offence to that. It is the view of a member. This is getting silly -

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Speaker, I will withdraw. The Greens relentlessly attack Public Health and they have done so the whole summer. What they are doing is appalling. If Ms O'Connor is so thin-skinned about being confronted with her own history on that, it says a lot about her and the Greens. As for the Labor Party, they have attacked Public Health by proxy.

Mr SPEAKER - On the granting of leave, please.

Mr FERGUSON - They have constantly undermined the Government on key points along the way through the pandemic: open the borders, close the borders.

The motion from Ms O'Connor is not an urgent motion from the point of view of the House. I understand why Ms O'Connor is moving this way: she wants to rearrange the order of business for the day with an open debate on a censure motion against the minister that she is opposed to. It is disappointing that the Labor Party wants to support that when we have important matters scheduled for the day.

Mr Speaker, we do not support Ms O'Connor's motion. It is important that the House gives its attention to the matters on the notice paper today.

Mr SPEAKER - I make the point, this is the very reason why we should be sticking to the motion of seeking leave, not about debating, because this interaction should not be happening through the seeking of leave. It is only when members stray into the motion that we have the banter that is here. That is the very reason that the standing order over censure has been put in place.

[12.09 p.m.]

Ms JOHNSTON (Clark) - Mr Speaker, I support the seeking of leave for the urgent motion. With respect to your earlier direction about the importance of speaking to the leave motion, I will respond to the minister's comments about urgency and why it is urgent that we seek leave now. Without wanting to put words into the Leader of the Greens' mouth regarding to some of the commentary Mr Ferguson has made about the urgency of this motion, I point out that for the last two days this parliament has been dealing with very important business primarily due to the failure of the minister to make a simple apology, to say two simple words: 'I'm sorry'. It appears that the minister has made an apology.

This is the first available opportunity to deal with this urgent matter. I do not want to put words into the Leader of the Greens' mouth but I suspect that is what she would like to say had she had the opportunity to speak again in relation to why this matter is an urgent matter and that the seeking of leave ought to be granted.

It is a serious matter. It relates to the information given to members of the public about Public Health. It deserves to have debate and clarity. I agree with the Opposition Leader that this parliament deserves the opportunity to have members of the Government put forward their arguments and maybe even table evidence or documents providing advice.

It is an urgent motion when we are talking about the lives of Tasmanians and the importance of accuracy when providing Public Health advice, and accuracy in statements that ministers make. I will be supporting this motion and I note that this is the first available opportunity to have this urgent matter considered, given that Mr Ferguson and Ms Archer have taken three days of this parliament sitting to say 'I'm sorry'. This is the first available opportunity.

[12.11 a.m.]

Ms DOW (Braddon - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Speaker, we will be supporting this motion to suspend standing orders again this morning. As others have said, we have not had the opportunity to examine this issue prior to this point given the nature of the events of the past few days here and this Government's reluctance to apologise. This has happened today and I thank them again for that.

In case the Government has forgotten, and in case Mr Ferguson has forgotten, we are in the midst of a pandemic. It is critical that the information provided to people is accurate. People are confused about what to do at this time. Today gives us a great opportunity to examine some of those things and the role of government in providing good Public Health advice and information to the people of Tasmania, providing them with leadership on COVID-19 and their response across the community. They are not doing that very well at the moment. This offers us a very good opportunity to do that. That is why we welcome Ms O'Connor's motion to suspend standing orders to debate this motion this morning.

We have never strayed from Public Health advice. We understand the importance of Public Health advice and working with our amazing Public Health officials across Tasmania, who have done an outstanding job. What we have questioned, Mr Ferguson, is your response and your preparedness. It has been about the Government. It is not about Public Health. We have the utmost respect for our Public Health professionals across this state.

If there is supporting Public Health advice, let us see it. It is another simple thing this Government just will not do.

I put out a release yesterday which I would love the opportunity to speak more about with you today, Mr Ferguson, about booster rates across the state and how the vaccination of five- to 11-year olds, particularly on the north-west coast, has stalled. That is so important across the state.

I take every opportunity I can to talk about the importance of good public education measures when it comes to COVID-19 because we think the Government has not done a very good job on that.

I do not want to spark that topic but I want to substantiate why this motion is important today and why we should be suspending standing orders. People are confused about what they should be doing; they do not know when they are meant to wear a mask. You can see it when you are out and about in the community.

In conclusion, we think that it is fair and right to suspend standing orders today to speak about this important matter, the information that is provided by Government to the people of Tasmania about how they keep themselves safe. We are in the midst of a pandemic. We are seeing case numbers climb to 2000 today. It is quite incredible. You would not know from

this Government that this was such an issue of importance across Tasmania. This gives us the opportunity to examine that fully. We should be doing that today.

We support the suspension of standing orders for the minister in question, who is not here in the Chamber today, to put forward his perspective on this matter. For him to table the Public Health advice, as is appropriate, and to instil that trust and confidence in the Tasmanian people that the advice and information being provided by Government about COVID-19 and keeping our community safe is accurate and in line with Public Health advice. Again, I put on the record that we stand solidly with Public Health and have done right throughout this pandemic.

Mr SPEAKER - The question is that leave be granted to suspend standing orders.

The House divided -

AYES 9

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

NOES 10

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

PAIRS

Ms O'Byrne
Ms Finlay

Mr Gutwein
Mr Tucker

Motion negatived.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Achievements in Government

[12.21 p.m.]

Mrs ALEXANDER (Bass) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House take note of the following matter:
achievements in government.

Today I would like to talk about the Government's achievements and putting that into perspective of where we were, where we are now and what underpins some of these achievements.

First and foremost, I would like to say that no-one, no team, no group of people can achieve anything unless they have good support from a lot of areas and a lot of layers that are around them. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the hardworking, dedicated and talented public servants who have assisted this Government, especially over the last two years, most of whom have gone above and beyond their efforts to keep the state safe.

I acknowledge that a lot of these achievements the Government has accomplished have also been done with the support from businesses and community organisations. There are a number of stakeholders in Tasmania that have underpinned a lot of the Government's achievements that we can proudly talk about today.

It is important that we look at the future generations and what this Government has achieved in education and supporting young people in reaching that very important position through education and empowering them, because how can we have a society that actually creates wealth for the future for themselves and better their lives unless they receive that really good, strong education?

The Government has extended high school to years 11 and 12 and also invested a record amount into education. As a result, we can say that the retention has jumped almost five percentage points to 76.1 per cent since 2019, which is the highest on record. That is a very important aspect that we need to talk about and be proud of.

The other thing that is important to talk about is that since coming to government our First Home Owner Grant has helped more than 3750 Tasmanians build their first home and of course the First Home Owner Grant of \$30 000 will be extended for another 12 months from 1 July 2022. That is another important aspect that we need to refer to.

Over the past three years also, very importantly, our work to achieve gender equality has been guided by the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2018-21. Under this strategy the Tasmanian Government has made important progress towards improving women's financial security, leadership and participation, opportunity, health, wellbeing and safety. Very soon we will launch the next iteration of the Tasmanian Women's Strategy which will build on our current work. This second stage will also have women's leadership at the forefront to ensure that more women are supported to be leaders of tomorrow.

These are things that we need to be proud of and we need to mention them because they are important. I have no doubt that some people would have expected me to start rolling out dollars, amounts and figures, which I will, but I thought it was important for me to start with the aspect of how and what is being done for those vulnerable in our society - children and for women.

Today, as governments and corporations around the world are seeking renewable energy solutions and announcing net-zero plans by 2050, we can proudly say that we can already generate 100 per cent of our energy from renewable resources. We also have a target to double that. In terms of net-zero, we achieved that aim in six out of the last seven years. That is something that we should be very proud of because we are leading in that space and are at the forefront of that process.

In addition to that, still part of renewable energy and our efforts to make our environment better, we have made up to \$12.3 million available for the trial of hydrogen buses and the investigation of opportunities to use green hydrogen for trucking and marine vessels.

Mr Speaker, what I can say is that the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government has turned our beautiful state around since 2014 and is continuing to secure Tasmania's future. Eight years ago the state was in a different place from where we are today, but now we can proudly say that we are the envy of the nation, thanks to the Government's strong plan and its vision which is aspiring to create a better future for this state.

Because of our strong economy we are now able invest in things that matter to Tasmanians. We note that our strong performance has underpinned some of the changes we have been able to introduce and we are looking forward to introducing some more. They include things like the new \$689 million Royal Hobart Hospital redevelopment. If I look in my electorate, the Launceston General Hospital redevelopment -

Time expired.

[12.28 p.m.]

Dr BROAD (Braddon) - Mr Speaker, this matter of public importance is government achievements. What has this Government achieved? The odometer has clicked over to eight years, so as we head into a decade of Liberal government, what has the Government achieved?

This Government has failed and they continue to fail. 'Envy of the nation' we heard Mrs Alexander say a second ago. I ask, is having the worst education results in the country the envy of the nation? Would the worst hospital waiting lists we have had on record be the envy of the nation? Would having the worst ambulance wait times be the envy of the nation? Not to mention pot-holed roads, delayed projects, and Tasmania's worst debt position. What have we got to show for that debt? The worst results all round. This is the definition of poor management. That is not an achievement. More money in, worst results. This is a tired and failing government that is simply not getting the basics right.

We heard the previous speaker, who brings on this matter of importance, talk about future generations. We are concerned about future generations, because under this Government, we have an education system that is failing our students. We know that, because we have the worst NAPLAN results ever. As demographer Lisa Denny demonstrated in her report, almost one in four Tasmanian grade 9s struggle to understand basic maths. Is that something to be proud of? Is that an achievement of this Government? More than one in four Tasmanian grade 9s cannot read well enough to understand what they are being taught. Is that an achievement?

Two in five grade 9s cannot express themselves in writing; is that an achievement? As Lisa Denny says:

As the 2001 Tasmanian year eight cohort progressed through their schoolings from lower primary to high school, their literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills progressively declined.

That period between lower primary and high school, when these students have been tested in their NAPLAN results from grade 3 through to grade 9, has been entirely under this Government's watch. What has happened? The results are worse. These children are being

left behind. That is what this Government is doing, and that is not an achievement; it is an absolute failure.

This Government is not only failing in education; they are failing workers. Workers are again worse off under the Liberals, with recent ABS data showing that the annual wage rise in Tasmania of 3 per cent fell well below the CPI of 4.5 per cent. The prices of everything are going up faster than people's wages. In effect, people are taking a pay cut, and it is worse now because of the massive impact of fuel prices. Fuel prices are well over \$2 and that means the cost of everything is going up, and that will make the situation worse. It means that people are cutting back on the little things - not going out to a restaurant for a family meal, or working on a weekend when you would rather spend time with your kids, because you need that extra money. That is under this Government. Tasmanians deserve better than a Government that is oblivious to the fact that life is getting harder and harder for families. The previous speaker did not recognise that.

What is the result of this? The economy shrank last quarter, while all the other states grew. That is this Government's record - that is where we are at right now. The other states are growing, Tasmania is going backwards; we did not hear about that. Of particular concern is a sharp drop in private capital investment, almost three times worse than the next worst result of any other jurisdiction. Boasting and bluster is not borne out by the data, and it is clear that Tasmanian families - and Tasmanian businesses and individuals - are suffering the effects. Cost of living pressures are already hurting far too many Tasmanians. It will only get worse, with an economy in reverse - facing significant headwinds that this Government just will not acknowledge.

What has this Government actually delivered in eight years? When the eight years ticked over the Government put out a press release about their list of achievements, and they had to include things like, 'delivering a new Bridgewater bridge'. Well, where is it? We are going to have to walk on water, if there is a new Bridgewater bridge, because we cannot actually see it. This Government has pretended to be delivering that bridge ever since I have come into this parliament some five years ago. This is how bad the list was, that they registered as an achievement, they ticked off as though it had been done, committing to a new 10-year plan to supply 10 000 affordable and social houses by 2032. Simply making a commitment, after eight years that you are going to do something - that is an achievement. That promise is to deliver more than three houses a day for the next 10 years. What is their actual record? That was also listed as an achievement: 'delivering nearly 2000 long term homes and building lots since 2004'. In eight years, they have delivered about two-thirds of a house a day. Now, the Government is saying they are going to deliver three a day, which is four-and-a-half times the current rate. As if!

They have also banked purchasing the new *Spirit of Tasmania* vessels. It took eight years to get to this point, and we know the false starts they had by pretending it could all be done and Tasmania. They had to go crawling back to Finland. What did Labor do in Labor's first four years of Government? We actually purchased the new ships. They sailed up the river in Devonport in under four years. With this Government, after eight years, they have a promise. When are the ships going to be delivered? Because of their delays and stuff-ups, it is at least a year or two later than they promised.

Turning to infrastructure, they promised to spend \$1 billion, and do not even get close. When it comes over cloudy on the Bass Highway, it falls to pieces. The shiploader in Burnie

is being delayed, along with the Cradle Mountain Cableway; the new Tamar Bridge; the underground bus mall; the four-lane Midland Highway. Their achievement is that they just do not deliver. It is bluff and bluster.

Time expired.

[12.36 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, what a rubbish MPI. You know when a Government is reduced to an MPI congratulating itself over its thin achievements, they really are in trouble. I nearly did not bother because I have a busy day, given that Dr Woodruff is not here, together with a number of other members because of this Government's 'let it rip' approach to COVID-19. However, there are a few things I want to lay on the record and I am just going to lay out some data here.

What the Government has achieved since 15 December is the infection of 75 334 Tasmanians, that we know of - because even Dr Veitch says, reported case numbers are not reflective of true case numbers. We know that overnight, the Government has achieved the infection of at least 2009 Tasmanians. That is the total new reported cases overnight. Mrs Alexander talked about the importance of looking out for future generations. I could not agree more.

Through sending children back into unsafe schools, unvaccinated and unmasked, this Government has achieved more than 20 000 children and young people under the age of 19 being infected with SARS-CoV-2. The evidence tells us that around one in four of those Tasmanian children will endure long-lasting health impacts for some months at least, if not in perpetuity. It is not what Tasmanians are being told, but we know that COVID-19 rapidly ages your cells. This Government has achieved, through sending vulnerable children back into classrooms, the mass infection of our next generation of community leaders, political leaders, business leaders. That is what this Government has achieved. It has sent children back into unsafe schools.

There have been 16 preventable deaths since 15 December. These were people who were living full lives, pre-COVID-19. These were people who were loved. Not one of them suffered a mild death. Not one of the Australians who are dying at the rate of one every half-an-hour since the beginning of this year from COVID-19 - nearly 6000 so far - they did not die mild deaths either.

This Government's achievement is to bow to the business lobby and the sociopaths who argue for a let-it-rip policy and unleashed this virus on this island and then removed all protections. What this Government has achieved for people who are older or living with a disability, or who are immunocompromised, is to make them more fearful. I know plenty of people with disability. What Ms Ogilvie yesterday called anxiety is, in fact, in many cases sheer, unmitigated terror. They are frightened of catching this virus and so they should be, even though they have been gaslit into believing it is mild. They see hospitalisations, deaths. They are aware enough of the risk of contracting this virus.

What this Government has achieved is to send people with compromised immune systems indoors, basically. It is either achieved by putting them at risk or isolating them, because the one thing they never talk about is the impact of unfettered mass infection on vulnerable people because they do not want to talk about those who are being left behind, those

who are being shut out of society because you have governments failing to protect the health of their citizens.

We are a state with the oldest and fastest ageing population in the country, the highest chronic disease burden and the highest level of disability. That makes Tasmanians particularly vulnerable at a population level, and we now know at least 75 000 Tasmanians have been infected, and if you look at the evidence from interstate and what independent healthcare experts say, that number could be as much as double.

Plenty of people are not getting tested, plenty of people are telling themselves it is just a cold, plenty of people are not registering their RATs, so the infection rate in our community is much higher. This Government's crowning health achievement is to make this island less safe, to force workers back into offices that are less safe, to remove mask protections so we are all less safe, to gaslight people into believing this is a mild illness, and to further gaslight people into thinking this can be managed like a cold or the flu.

A virus that shrinks your brain, enlarges your heart, can be found throughout your blood system and in every organ, is not a mild virus. There is plenty of evidence coming in now that even in triple-vaccinated people who have had a 'mild' case of COVID, the risk of long COVID is very high. I have a friend, a local, quite a well-known lawyer, who is triple vaccinated. He contracted COVID-19, genuinely thought he was going to die and asked his wife to wake him up in the night just to give him a prod, because he thought he was going to die in his sleep. He is triple-vaccinated, athletic, not 60 years old, and he thought he was going to die. Do not give us this garbage about your achievements when you are busy infecting and sickening the people of this island.

Time expired.

[12.43 a.m.]

Mr ELLIS (Braddon) - Mr Speaker, I have to say to the shadow treasurer, if that really is his real job in this place, his comments on the Bridgewater bridge and about members swimming across the Derwent reminded me that even if we did manage to walk on water he would probably say that it was because we could not swim. It is typical of the relentless negativity and the myopic talking down of Tasmania. That small-hearted vision does not look beyond the horizon to the Tasmania that we can be, and not look to the inspiration of people like Jim Bacon, who believed in a bigger and better Tasmania. They instead crawled up into that sad little Labor-Greens ball that ran this state that Dr Broad was so keen to be a part of when he first ran for parliament.

The Tasmanian majority Liberal Government has been delivering, and we have a proud record of doing so since we came to government all those years ago in 2014. It has been said a number of times in recent weeks, and I will say it again. The Government has a plan to secure Tasmania's future. It is a strong plan and we make no apologies for the aspirational vision that we have for this state. It is a shame that those opposite do not share an aspiration for Tasmania, but we are getting on with the job.

In my electorate of Braddon, we have delivered unprecedented investments into the things that matter, and today I will talk about health and education, and I hope that those members opposite who have had the opportunity to experience these things in our electorate

which have been delivered under this Government could at least give credit for those things that have been built in the last eight years.

For our health system, we have been recruiting more staff in our region in the north-west, west coast and King Island, with 150 more staff in our north-west hospitals after the 2021 election. Then we were elected and another 64 full-time equivalent workers have been recruited since July last year. That is more doctors, more nurses, more allied health professionals in our health system and, importantly, it is what these staff do that enables us to deliver more services.

At the North West Regional we have opened new beds, reversing the closures that were made under the Labor-Greens government. We know that right around the state they had a sad and shameful record of not just shutting beds and putting them in storage, but closing whole wards and sacking a nurse a day for nine months. We have reversed that and we are very proud of it. We had a lot of work to do when we came to government and we are getting on with the job.

The Government delivered the North West Cancer Centre, saving members of the north-west community thousands of trips into Launceston each year for radiology treatment, and established the Acute Stroke Telemedicine Service. Cancer is a terrible thing. Every Tasmanian has a cancer story, whether it is themselves, friends or family, and the investment this Government has made - and I want to pay tribute as well to the federal Liberal government for supporting that too - has been truly transformative for cancer patients on the north-west, west coast and King Island. I hope that the relentless negativity opposite can at least acknowledge that.

At the Mersey - I must say the most loved hospital in our entire state and my local - we have built and delivered a range of upgrades and new facilities. There will be new antenatal facilities, upgraded palliative care facilities and a helipad to ensure that life-saving care can be administered faster and linked up with the state's healthcare system through a dedicated aeromedical service. That is yet another dedicated service that did not even exist before this Government was elected. I was only reflecting with community members in Latrobe over the weekend about just how many flights are coming into that helipad now and getting patients to the best care possible in a timely manner. That would not be possible without this Government's record of achievement. Instead, there would just be an empty shell at the Mersey Hospital if this Government and Liberal governments for the last 17 years had not supported this important piece of community health infrastructure. It would be closed under the Labor-Greens government that those opposite were so desperate to be a part of.

I am excited about getting on with the job of establishing rural medical workforce centre training hubs so that we can get more locally trained rural generalist doctors in our system and improve the security of our medical workforce. Of course it is not just the major hospitals in the state, there is the \$10.5 million stage 2 redevelopment of the King Island Hospital. I have been up there and seen the fantastic work that has been delivered for a new modern facility that the community deserves. The Smithton Ambulance Station has benefited from a \$1.1 million upgrade that delivered new training areas, something I was proud to advocate for, even as a candidate in the 2018 election.

We have big plans for the health system going forward and right around my electorate of Braddon, including a new ambulance station for Queenstown. At the Mersey we will be

providing a \$20 million upgrade for an additional ward and a new kitchen as part of the largest ever redevelopment of the Mersey hospital, which the Labor Opposition wanted to close. There will be a \$100 million redevelopment of the North West Regional Hospital, delivering the first stage of the new mental health precinct, which I hope every member of this House can agree on, and the refurbishment of the Spencer Wing to provide additional wards.

It is not just the health system that is benefiting from this Government. We have been committed to investing in upgrades for educational facilities all around the north-west, including \$7 million for Smithton High School to refurbish general learning areas, specialist facilities, including new science and music suites and a refurbished library and ICT area; \$10 million to redevelop Latrobe High, including building a new library, as well as performing arts, hospitality and gym facilities; and \$10.5 million for Devonport High School for upgraded learning environments and support spaces and administrative and car parking improvements. Every member who drives through Devonport can see the amount of work going on at that vital piece of educational infrastructure. There have also been investments in Wynyard High School, Cooe High School, Montello Primary School, Somerset Primary School and Boat Harbour Primary.

Mr Speaker, I could be here all day. They are the things that we are delivering in the north-west in education and there is even more and, not to mention, the other services from right around the state.

Time expired.

[12.50 p.m.]

Mr WINTER (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, thank goodness he did not go all day. The member for Braddon just read parts of the budget that any government delivers every year - just a list of things that he could have read from a budget.

The MPI is about the Government's track record over almost a decade and it is not a very good one. I am surprised that this was the MPI when we heard what the MPI was about at 9.30 a.m. this morning. You might have heard the shouts and cries of laughter in the Labor ranks this morning as we cackled at how ridiculous it was. Then we had a bit of a debate over who got to get up and speak.

This is well-summed up in the Government's own '2014 Change for a Brighter Future' document that I keep on my desk to remind myself how terrible this Government is, how they failed to deliver and how the economic plans of Premier Peter Gutwein are not working for Tasmanians. I want to start from the start, 'We are going to fix the planning mess with a state-wide planning scheme'. That was in 2014. We still do not have a state-wide planning scheme. Here we are in 2022. I did some amazing research from the failed planning minister, Premier Peter Gutwein, where he actually claims victory and says that he has finished the planning reform. That was back in 2017 when he said, 'Government delivers on a single state-wide planning scheme'. He thought he had finished. He gave up. It is still not finished. It is still not going.

He put another failed planning minister, minister Roger Jaensch, in charge who also failed to deliver planning and now put a new planning minister, minister Ferguson, to try and fix up the mess from Premier Gutwein and minister Jaensch.

They said they were going to disaggregate government contracts. Bridgewater bridge was mentioned earlier and it is a shame that that project has been left to a single large tenderer who, presumably, will then go back to some Tasmanian businesses and so they should, but an example where that has not occurred.

They said that they would back our forestry and mining sectors. They cannot deliver the 137 000 cubic metres of saw log that has been legislated by this Government. They cannot deliver. They want to lock up the wood bank. They have torn up their own plan to end lock-ups. This is a government that said they would have no more lock-ups and yet they plan to do more lock-ups.

Develop a world-class fishery - they have now implemented a moratorium on the growth in the salmon industry. There is no word from the Government as to when the moratorium will end. It was supposed to be for only one year but I wonder whether they will lift that moratorium that has stopped the expansion of the aquaculture industry and in particular salmon. I note that the member for Braddon sits with his head down because I strongly doubt that he supported that policy.

The Liberals said that they set a goal that by the end of the first six years of a major Liberal Government, Tasmania would be at or above the national standard in every NAPLAN measure and meet national benchmarks in reading, writing, maths and science. What a disgrace to stand up here and say that it is about the future of Tasmania when Tasmanian students have gone backwards under this Government. On 13 out of 20 of the NAPLAN measures, Tasmania has the worst results of any state or territory in Australia. What an absolute travesty for young Tasmanians who enter the education system wanting to create a career for themselves and this Liberal Government has let them down. It continues to let them down, yet claiming victory in today's contributions.

Mr Speaker, they said they were going to fix the budget mess. They complained, can you believe, they said:

This year's budget deficit is the biggest in Tasmania's history and it is 50 per cent bigger than forecast in last year's budget.

This Premier and Treasurer, Peter Gutwein, will deliver this year the largest budget deficit in Tasmania's history which will beat the record that he set last year, which will beat the record that he set the year before. Incredible. This is the party that said in 2014 that the deficit back then was too high. They talked about debt, they said forecast net debt peak was \$134 million. We are now measuring debt and projected debt under the Treasury's long-term forecast released in the middle of last year for up to \$30 billion in debt and here they are complaining about \$132 million in debt. The only consistent thing about this Government has been the same Treasurer here for the entire period. He is a treasurer of debt and deficit and his economic plans are not working for Tasmanians.

This is a government that now has a plan to increase the cost of living for Tasmanians. They have a new bin tax. That has to go on their record of achievement, or lack of achievement, in the first eight years of government. The new bin tax slugs every Tasmanian with a wheelie bin, every Tasmanian who goes to the tip.

Water and sewerage charges planned, again by Treasurer Peter Gutwein, to go up by 3.5 per cent. The draft determination by the Economic Regulator will not even allow him to do that. The regulator is saying, 'No, your plans for cost increases on Tasmanians are too high'. Unfortunately, still looking at above 3 per cent, which is too high.

We have plans from this Government to increase Tasmanian's power bills, charging them for the aurora+ app whether they like it or not. Whether they even have access to the app or not, whether they can actually use it or not, this Government wants to charge Tasmanians and increase their cost of living.

This has been a failure of a government. Their list of achievements had to be read by the member for Braddon as a simple list of things that have been funded in budgets over eight years. There is no economic reform. You want to compare to Jim Bacon? Good luck to you. Jim Bacon actually achieved things, he actually delivered things. He delivered new *Spirits*, his government started and finished Basslink and Tasmanian Gas Pipeline. These are achievements by a good government that should never be compared to the rabble on the other side of the House.

Time expired.

Matter noted.

MOTION

Sessional Orders - Amendments

[12.57 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, I move -

That the House notes that unless otherwise ordered, for the remainder of this Session -

- (1) Standing Order 42 be amended by leaving out paragraph (c), and inserting the following new paragraph:

"(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (a) and the weekly rotations prescribed in paragraph (b):

- (i) The Independent Member for Clark, may, once in every second rotation of 'Week One'; and
- (ii) The Independent Member for Franklin, may, once in every second rotation of 'Week Two',

call on an item of Private Members Business at Noon to 1.00 p.m.

- (2) Standing Order 43 be amended by inserting the following new paragraph:

"() The duration of a Question shall not exceed 1 minute."

- (3) Standing Order 45 be amended by inserting the following new paragraph:

"() Only one Point of Order made pursuant to this Standing Order may be taken per answer."

- (4) Standing Order 46 be suspended.
- (5) Standing Order 48 be amended by leaving out, "When the Speaker considers a Minister or other Member has had sufficient time to answer a Question", and inserting instead, "After the expiration of four minutes".
- (6) Sessional Order 48A be amended by leaving out "the Independent Member for Clark if such Member seeks the call", and insert instead, "each Independent Member, if such Members seek the call".

We only have a very brief period before the break but I will commence. The motion was tabled yesterday to allow members to have a look at it. The changes to sessional orders will ensure that question time and private members' business run more smoothly and fairly. It will amend standing order 42 to include the independent Labor member for Franklin, Mr O'Byrne, as he is now known, in the rotation to move private members' motions. It will also amend standing order 48A to allow the independent Labor member for Franklin, Mr O'Byrne, to ask questions during question time. Members would already be more than aware that Mr O'Byrne is somewhat locked out of question time unless questions run early, and every party gets the minimum number of questions before the hour is elapsed. Mr O'Byrne has been quick on his feet a few times and snatched one from the jaws of his former leader but we have been in discussions and looked for something that is more reasonable there.

I will also mention that the Australian Parliament's House of Representatives standing orders are instructive for us. The duration of each question asked by a government or opposition member is limited to 30 seconds. The duration of each question asked by a non-aligned member is limited to 45 seconds. This is done to ensure that question time is conducted in an orderly manner to prevent gratuitously long questions and answers, and ensure that the primary function of question time is maintained to allow the opposition of the day to hold the government to account.

To that end, the motion will amend standing order 43 to limit the duration of a question to one minute, and amend - I should say sessional orders - come in to amend standing order 43 to limit the duration of a question to one minute and amend standing order 48 for the sessional orders purposes to limit the duration of an answer to four minutes.

Members opposite might be wondering why the Government is moving an amendment to limit its own answers. We want to see question time run in an even more orderly way, with more time for questions and answers, and also less disruption.

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

MOTION

Sessional Orders - Amendments

Resumed from above.

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, before we suspended, I was outlining proposed time limits for questions. The Government wishes to have question time work better for all, and to be more orderly. This can be done in a few ways, and two of the measures work together.

The first measure is to limit the asking of questions to a minute. That is still longer than the 30 seconds provided in the national parliament, which was a reference point for me. We have proposed a minute, noting that questions in this House sometimes - not often - go for longer, up to a couple of minutes. The other proposal is for a time limit of four minutes for answers. Occasionally, Mr Speaker, on indulgence, you may allow a person to go longer if the subject required it, but that is for another time.

The result of this measure will be that more questions are asked - we are actually trying to fit in an extra question - and that they are asked of Government ministers in a more concise format. It will ultimately mean that question time will better fulfil its role of providing an opportunity for members to hold the Government to account and to scrutinise, just as happens every day in here.

When in Opposition, Rene Hidding negotiated with the then Labor-Greens Government for a minimum number of questions. That had not previously occurred. I believe it started at six questions, then went to seven. I have consistently maintained that it should be seven, even though some suggested to me, not unreasonably, that perhaps Labor should share some of their questions with Mr O'Byrne, after he was pushed out of the Labor Party caucus. I understand that the answer was no; and so, here we are.

Given that members have an assurance of a minimum number of questions, the Clerk has advised me that standing order 46 has gone unused and is redundant. On that advice, this motion would suspend that standing order as well. That is in relation to supplementary questions. In a parliament where you did not have a minimum number of questions, and a minimum allocation, supplementary questions were used.

Ms O'Connor - Could you flesh out the proposed changes to points of order? I consider it is undemocratic to have no member at all, able to ask any more than one person asking a point of order.

Mr FERGUSON - I was just about to get to the part of my motion which deals with standing order 45, which is thoroughly abused in this House, as you noted today and yesterday.

We have sought advice on procedures around points of order. They exist to ensure that proper debate is upheld in the Chamber. A little known fact is that standing order 45 actually talks about the member asking the question being relevant to their question and not debating it. The latter part of that standing order deals with that the answer shall be relevant to the question.

My amendment before the House, does not seek to change or interfere with the longstanding way in which that is governed and ruled. However, the abuse of it has been where members, more than once, stand during an answer to raise with you, Mr Speaker - or whoever is in the Chair - that you should draw your attention to standing order 45 and then as Speaker you would then deal with the matter on a case-by-case basis. Where it has been abused is not raising it once but raising it more than once. I have taken advice from the Clerk on what

happens in the national parliament to deal with the same problem, so that is what we are seeking now to emulate.

Procedures around points of order exist to ensure proper debate is upheld in the Chamber. Standing order 45 specifically exists to assist here with relevance, but it is not there to be used as a tool by members to disrupt ministers attempting to answer questions. If I am not mistaken, it might have been on Tuesday last when the Premier in his last question answered the question directly and then went on to a broader answer and had four or five points of order taken on standing order 45, even though he had answered the question. This motion will amend standing order 45 to limit its usage to once per answer. It is in relation to this -

Ms O'Connor - But once from whom? Does that mean if I ask a question, I can take a point of order but no one else could raise a point of order on it? It is actually poorly drafted.

Members interjecting.

Mr FERGUSON - I hear the question and I hear the interjection from the Labor Party saying that is ridiculous. It is what happens in the national parliament and it is because it is being abused. I will also point out my earlier comment before 1.00 p.m. - why would the Government be prepared to put maximum time limits on answers? It is because without these two working together, you do not get the order we are looking for here. That is very reasonable. They must be complementary.

Ms O'Connor - But you're trying to shut down all members.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - They must be complementary - and that is not the case. In fact, without a member standing in their place and raising a point of order under standing order 45, the Speaker is already administering the standing orders. However, if something gets unruly or there is a concern that a minister is no longer being relevant, then one person can stand and raise that point of order, but not 25.

I am more than aware of Mr Winter's amendment which he has shared, where he would like to allow -

Mr Winter interjecting.

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Winter, my motion has been on the notice paper. I am not sure what you are -

Mr SPEAKER - Order. We are not in Committee. The Leader of the House is explaining his motion. Other people will have an opportunity to make comment on that when we get around to that point in the debate. Leader, continue, please.

Mr FERGUSON - It surprises me. These initiatives go together. If you are not supportive of that, it would not be reasonable to put time limits as well. They have to work together. We had an MPI the other day where half the member's MPI was taken up with points of order as to who got the jump. That has to go. That has to stop.

Ms O'Connor - Says you.

Mr FERGUSON - Says me - correct. That is why I am moving it. Standing order 45 remains and it is allowed to be used. The Speaker can have his or her attention drawn to standing order 45 during every question if necessary, I suppose, but not multiple times in the one answer.

Ms O'Connor - It should just apply to the person who has asked the question.

Mr FERGUSON - That is another way that you could have looked at it.

Ms O'Connor - No, that would be a more reasonable way.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor. You know that constantly interjecting is not parliamentary. You will get an opportunity to speak on this issue. Please do not keep interrupting the Leader of the House while he is making his contribution.

Mr FERGUSON - Ms O'Connor says maybe you should only limit it to the person who has asked the question, but it is actually a matter for the whole House when a question is being answered. If a member wishes to chance their arm and test with the Speaker that the minister who is answering the question is not being appropriately relevant, then any member could rise and make that point of order, and they do. It happens often. It is just not going to work. If you are not prepared to see the merit of that, then I cannot see the merit of time limits on answers. Such is the case as occurs in the national parliament and that is what I am seeking to introduce here in the sessional orders.

My wrapping-up would reinforce the fact that these are sessional orders and are temporary in nature. The temporary constitution of this House for now is what you see around you, Mr Speaker. We have two independent members - one Independent, one independent Labor. We have a lot of competition for questions and nobody prepared to give any ground, apart from the Government in relation to the allocation of questions.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - I do not understand those strange interjections because it is only the Government that has actually agreed to take on board an additional question each day, a hostile question -

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - Calm down, calm down - and offer up a further hour of government business time for Mr O'Byrne, the independent Labor member, to have some private member's time. I do not understand those interjections. Maybe I am missing something.

Mr Speaker, these are not changes that are permanent to the standing orders; quite properly there is a process for that. I conclude by saying I feel, and I hope others will generally

agree, that the sessional orders we have generally seem to work pretty well. They allow members the opportunity to ask questions. Were it not for the sessional orders we introduced, your good friend, Ms Johnston, would not be able to ask a question every single day, Ms O'Connor.

Ms O'Connor - It was the way you said that.

Mr FERGUSON - That is the way we have introduced those. In fact, without the sessionals, question time would be a straight-out 60-minute process and answers could be as long as they like. They would be no guaranteed minimum of seven at all for the Opposition of the day. I am making the point that I feel the sessional orders generally work okay.

On DDs - thank you, Ms White, for raising that - under your government with Labor and the Greens it was six questions -

Ms O'Connor - That's a lie.

Mr SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor, you will withdraw that, unconditionally.

Ms O'Connor - I withdraw it. It is not true.

Mr FERGUSON - It is true, Mr Speaker; six questions were asked of the government by the governing parties, Labor and the Greens.

Ms O'Connor - No.

Mr FERGUSON - We are four, and it is hard to forget, Ms O'Connor, your praise of your good friend, Basil O'Halloran, when he asked you a question -

Ms O'Connor - Me and my good friend. You're pathetic.

Mr FERGUSON - I am pretty sure your first sentence - no, it was not 'You're pathetic', it was, 'Oh Basil, you are such a cutie.' That is what you said.

I am more than aware that members are not very happy with the Government giving Mr O'Byrne a question and some private member's time. It is not acceptable to me that a member of the House finds themselves broadly unable to ask a question.

Ms O'Connor - Well, it has been for the last six months.

Mr FERGUSON - It has only been the case since the middle of last year, when Mr O'Byrne was ejected from the Labor caucus. I do not know how long that situation will continue to be the case but the way that the Clerk has provided me the drafting for this is to allow that an independent member - and indeed each of them, whether there is zero, one, or two or a different number - each day in this parliament under these sessional orders they would be able to ask a question each day. It does not mean they have to, but they have that opportunity.

I am happy to sum up after listening to other people's contributions but I commend the motion to the House and I thank the Clerk for his research on what happens in the federal parliament and his support in drafting this.

[2.43 p.m.]

Mr WINTER (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, the Leader of the House is right that this was tabled yesterday and available for members to look at overnight. However, what needs to be put on the record is that there has been no consultation from him in relation to this. Not a word, not a discussion, nothing at all from the Leader of the House, who has previously talked himself up as someone who would like to ensure that the House works respectfully and well together, yet this is how he treats the opposition parties and crossbenchers.

There has been no consultation in relation to these proposed changes. They were just dropped yesterday on the table for us to read. I know I have amendments, I know Ms O'Connor has amendments and I think the Independent member for Clark also has amendments to put forward, because what is proposed here will not work as minister Ferguson puts forward. He said the new sessional orders would work for all and work better. That is not what will happen here.

I have a few concerns. The first is the lack of consultation. I am not sure what the point of the Standing Orders Committee is if it is not to discuss things like this. I am on the Standing Orders Committee so I know it has not been discussed. If we are not going to talk about the changing of the sessional orders within a committee like that, when will that committee ever meet? This would have been something we could have sat down and worked on together across the Chamber to ensure that we had a set of outcomes for everyone.

I agree that Mr O'Byrne should be able to ask questions in question time. Of course, any member should be able to ask questions in question time. We do not dispute that. Our position has been that we do not want to give up questions. It is important that we do not give up questions. That has also been the position from Mr O'Byrne, that he does not want to see the Opposition losing questions. It is important that all members are able to scrutinise the Government, even the backbench, although I am not sure if we have seen too much scrutiny going on in the questions from the back.

This could get quite messy this afternoon and we could be here for a long time because of the way the Leader of the House has handled this matter. I do not intend to stand here for 40 minutes because I suspect we are going to be up and back quite a few times while we try to sort this mess out, unless it is guillotined.

Standing order 45, as proposed to be amended here, is a really important standing order. The reason it is quoted and used so often, particularly by members of the crossbench and members of the opposition, is because it is the only mechanism we have to ensure that government ministers actually answer the question, which is something they do not do. The standing orders are there for members to use. They are not abused, as the Leader of the House says. They are never abused. They are there when ministers are not being relevant to the question. Standing order 45 is very clear. It says: 'Answers shall be relevant to the question'. When we have ministers in here starting to talk about federal Liberal candidates for Lyons in a question that was about Marinus, I am going to raise a point of order.

The problem with the proposal by the Leader of the House, who has behaved incredibly poorly on this, is that a member of his side could get up at the start of a debate, quote standing order 45 on relevance, be dismissed by you, Mr Speaker, then sit down, which leaves the rest of us who are only asking for the minister to be relevant with nothing to use. It is shutting down debate in this place. It is abhorrent.

Ms O'Connor - It is scandalous. Early-onset fascism.

Mr ELLIS - Point of order, Mr Speaker, I ask for that be withdrawn. That is personally offensive. Fascism cost the lives of tens of millions of people in the 20th century. No members of democratic parliaments, particularly this one, should be compared to them. I take personal offence.

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, it was unparliamentary to do that. I am warning you that if you make another comment along those lines or cross the line, you will not be included in this debate. You will be outside the Chamber.

Mr WINTER - Mr Speaker, I would like to move that the motion be amended by -
amending paragraph (3) to insert, ', per Member' at the end of the sentence.

The reason I move that is because it stops the Government from being able to behave in the way I just described. Under the changes proposed by the Leader of the House, a member of the Government backbench, or a minister, could stand up and call a standing order 45 point of order during any answer to any question, thus taking away that ability from every member in this place.

Say Mr Ferguson is right and someone in this place would abuse the privilege of standing order 45. Why should that take away the ability for any of the other 23 members who are not raising the point of order, or on their feet, from using that standing order? Standing order 45 should be available to keep the ministers relevant. We see this every day from these ministers. They are looking for any way they can to avoid answering the question.

When we ask questions, we do not ask questions on behalf of ourselves, we ask them on behalf of the Tasmanian people. Our job is to hold them to account and they treat us with disdain. They say that we abuse the standing orders because we ask them to be relevant to the question. Asking important questions about the behaviour of this Government and wanting to talk about erroneous candidates for Lyons for the Liberal Party - who cares? We just want the question answered. Is it too much to ask that ministers of the Crown stand up in front of not just the parliament but the Tasmanian people and answer a question?

If the Government denies this amendment, what they are saying is that they are not prepared to be held to account by the Tasmanian people, that they are not prepared to answer questions from the Tasmanian people. That will be a dark day for this place.

Mr SPEAKER - Member for Franklin.

Ms O'Connor - Why?

Mr SPEAKER - Because he rose just in front of you.

[2.51 p.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, I rise to speak on the amendment. I want to make clear that all I am seeking to do in this process is to ensure that I am treated like other members of this House in the sessional orders to ensure that I am able to exercise my democratic right to ask a question and to access private members' time to represent my community, the people of Franklin.

I have been holding discussions with the Government over a number of months about how best to do that. I was hopeful that this would not be a controversial process. I was hoping that we could work through this in a way where, essentially, I am given the same rights as the other crossbench members in their ability to ask a question because it has been articulated before.

I have been able to ask three questions since moving to the crossbench because the standing orders dictate that the Labor Opposition, with their seven questions, should have that number maintained; the Greens, two; Independent member for Clark, one; and the Government has their four questions. It is only if all of those questions are asked within one hour that I am able to ask a question. That has happened, fortunately for me, unfortunately for the people of Franklin, three times. Based on my research since the Independent member was re-elected to this House in 2019, apart from my three questions, it has only happened on four occasions where the number of questions is asked within the hour where the standard questions are asked. That is not good for democracy. It is not good for this House that a member is effectively gagged from representing their community.

Therefore, I have been seeking to get access to those questions. I have been having discussions. It has been protracted. That has frustrated me somewhat but I have been respectful of the processes of the House. I have not sought to disrupt the functions of question time. I have waited until the questions have been asked across the Chamber and I have been not taken on a couple of occasions because the standing orders predicate that you call other members of this House.

Getting access to private members' time is important for me as well to raise issues of importance to the people of Franklin. I want to make it very clear that I was not seeking to take anyone else's time away from the crossbench or from the Opposition, but seeking to get mirror access to private members' time similar to the Independent member for Clark - a level of consistency in the sessional orders and the standing orders to allow me to do that.

Again, I make the point: I have not sought anything more than what I believe is fair and equitable in terms of the existing arrangements applied to other members of this House.

I can understand why the Government has chosen this moment to look at some other, let us call them 'reforms', to question time. If there are ways that we can improve question time, we should take every opportunity to do that. I was not aware that the Standing Orders Committee had not discussed this or was not aware of it.

At every stage I have been open in terms of my view that I should be treated fairly and I do not want to detract or to take away. The Premier made the offer of an Opposition question in question time. It was given to me. It is not something the Premier can offer and it is not something I can accept because I am on the crossbench, I am not in the Opposition. The principle of seven questions is something I support and would not seek to take away from the

Opposition's seven questions. The Leader of the House has said as a matter of principle he supports that, so I have not tried to detract from that. I am disappointed that this has become more controversial than it should have been. I know I am in a unique set of circumstances but I was hopeful that we could work our way through this.

As to the other elements of the motion put forward by the Leader of the House about the time limits, I believe they are sensible and appropriate to ensure that question time and questions and answers are succinct and to the point, and that we can get through - as the people of Tasmania want us to do - the key issues of the day. Accountability of the Government is paramount in the role of question time. I know, unfortunately for all of us, it is the most watched moment of parliament. The cut and thrust can get a bit ugly at times, but the more questions people can ask and the more chance there is of scrutiny applied to the Government, the better democracy is. I believe the elements of the motion put forward by the Leader of the House in relation to asking and answering questions are sensible and bring us into line with other jurisdictions and other Westminster parliaments, so I support that.

Regarding standing order 45, I can understand why a government would want to try to restrict the ability of opposition parties and crossbench members to raise points of order. However, at the end of the day there are other forms of this House and the role of the Speaker to manage what the Leader of the House believes is unruly behaviour. Unfortunately, I think by trying to inhibit the rights of all members of this House to raise fair and decent points of order to achieve what is currently a point of discrimination against an individual member is not the way to achieve that. What you do is treat people equally and allow the forms of the House to be respected and allow points of order to be made. In my view, it is not fair and I do not think it is workable.

I can understand why you have linked the minutes with the points of order. I think that argument does hold some water. Saying that only one member can raise a standing order 45 point of relevance is not appropriate and unworkable. It is not just the person who asked the question who should have the right to raise a point of relevance under standing order 45, but other members are able to as well.

Mr Speaker, with respect, you have powers and the ability to preside over this forum in a manner which could potentially resolve those things. I am not reflecting on you at all in any way, but there are forms of the House and roles of the House that are currently in play which can potentially manage that if it becomes unruly in your eyes. I have sympathy with the Government for wanting to do that but I do not accept the underlying principle.

I also only saw this motion when it hit the deck yesterday, so I have been talking to both the Leader of the House - and you have been very respectful in listening -

Ms O'Connor - Maybe to you.

Mr O'BYRNE - I am frustrated that it has taken so long, Ms O'Connor, that we have got to this point six months after my change of circumstances and move to the crossbench, but we have formally been negotiating since Christmas time. I believe it was a matter of media commentary prior to Christmas that I have been seeking to form and achieve some consensus on this and I was hopeful that we could. I am supportive of the elements of the motion that give rise to ensure that I am treated equally in this House, and that is important for all of us.

I support the elements of the motion which provide a level of brevity to the questions and a little succinctness to the answers, and I believe that would be better for all of us in this House.

Unfortunately, in doing those good things, I do not support the move to restrict members' individual rights to raise points of order, whether legitimate or not. I have seen the amendments that are being put forward and we will debate them no doubt as we go through the next, hopefully not too long.

Ms O'Connor - No, we'll be here all afternoon.

Mr O'BYRNE - Well, hopefully not. Hopefully we can work our way through this because there are more important things. We have a bill this afternoon around the Climate Change Act which I think the people of Tasmania want us to debate.

Ms O'Connor - They have for a couple of years now.

Mr O'BYRNE - Absolutely. Democracy is important, people's rights are important, and that needs to be protected, but hopefully we can find a way to resolve this and work our way through so that all members in this House are treated equally.

[3.00 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, let us be really clear about what has happened here. Minister Ferguson, who was caught out for behaving badly and disrespectfully and then went on to behave like a petulant child and refused to apologise, is now punishing members of the Opposition and the crossbench. I have never seen such a significant change to the sessional orders just dumped on the table like that with no prior conversation, and I have been in parliament forever - 14 years.

This is not the way to make positive change to the House, but this is because Mr Ferguson is having a hissy fit. He will not communicate on changes to private members' time; his adviser does not return calls or texts anymore. He is the Leader of the House, we have another three years of this parliament, and that is the way he is going to be.

I am speaking on Mr Winter's amendment, which seeks to make sure that it only applies to individual members being able to take the point of order once. This is a scandalously sneaky change. It is designed to stifle voices in this place and let ministers get off the hook. When I talk about early onset fascism, which I am entitled to do, by the way, to express an opinion, one of the features of fascism is the stifling of dissenting voices. Another is the demonising of minorities. That is what is happening here.

I do not remember in my first two years as a Greens backbencher under the then Bartlett government ever using standing order 45 in question time. I might not have agreed with the way they answered the questions, but they had a go at being honest.

Ms Haddad - The Speaker sat them down if they weren't being relevant.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Polley was a very even-handed Speaker, that is true. Even if it was a pretence, I felt it was often even-handed. When I was a minister over those four years I do not think anyone even pulled a relevance point of order on me when I was answering a question at this lectern, because I answered the question. That is what decent ministers do.

The reason we are taking points of orders so often on relevance is because you get ministers who get up in here every single question time and refuse to answer questions, refuse to be honest. It is almost like there is no relationship between the question that is asked and the words that come out of the minister's mouth.

Twice today I asked the Minister for Health a straightforward question with no embellishment. In the first question, a set of facts and then the question, and then the second time just the question - and I still did not get an honest answer. Yesterday, I asked the Minister for Disability Services what information is being provided to people with disabilities about how to prevent infection. I did not get an answer. What we are being asked to accept here is more of that, without members in this place being able to exercise their democratic right to pull up a minister who is wasting parliament's time and taxpayers' money by being deceitful. That is what it is. It is deceitful to get up in this place and not answer a question in a Westminster parliament during question time.

The cause of members of the opposition and crossbench using standing order 45 is because of ministers who will not be honest. The most notorious example, of course, was the now Minister for Education, Children and Youth who swanned up to this lectern, when we had a Cabinet minute in our hands confirming that the Government was going to weaken tenancy protections, and telling an untruth about it at that lectern - when we had the document, that he did not know we had. It was okay to tell a complete untruth then, in this parliament; no consequences at all.

The House is being asked today to deny members their rights. We have an amendment which I will move after Mr Winter's amendment has been dealt with, that would delete this paragraph. It is unreasonable, undemocratic, and unworkable. This will encourage members of the opposition and the crossbench to find other provisions in the standing orders that we can pull up ministers on, and we will. Are we going to have another change to sessional orders if we do that?

Mr Winter - On a whim. He will not consult with anyone; he will just do what he wants.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is the arrogance. I cannot wait till you people are in opposition again.

Mr Ellis - You will not be around.

Ms O'CONNOR - You wish, Mr Ellis - the uber troll of this Chamber. Some really worrying trends are happening in this parliament. There is a lack of respect for democratic processes. I believe some quite arbitrary rulings are being made, and, as a Greens MP, I feel marginalised here, as does Dr Woodruff. It concerns me. The application of standing order 122 is so patchy and variable as it applies to the Greens, if they rose first. I simply ask you to consider that - we feel it. I am concerned that there is an attempt to censor our voices when we express an opinion. If I want to describe something the government's doing as early onset fascism, I consider that I am entitled to do that. It is an opinion that I have.

Mr Ellis - No wonder you only have two seats.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'CONNOR - No wonder you only got elected after countback, after criminal Brooks did not take his seat. You lost your seat, Mr Ellis - do you need to be reminded of that? You absolute fraud.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. Ms O'Connor, you know that is unparliamentary. You cannot call people names.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you Mr Speaker. I am constantly called names in that chair and nobody gets called up for that, and I do not have a bleat about it either.

Obviously, we want to see time limits on ministers' answers. They are regularly running to six or seven minutes in length - of course, only the Dorothy Dixers; and they are the only straight answers this place gets - if you can call something 'straight' that has been written by an adviser and is full of propaganda and the Government pumping up its tyres. There is no attempt to dodge a Dorothy Dix question like we always get. I cannot remember the last time I asked a minister a question in here and received a straight answer. I genuinely cannot remember. Maybe Mrs Petrusma, sometime this year.

Standing order 45 is frequently being used because ministers are not answering questions and feel no apparent obligation to do so. If any member of Government wants to have a look at the application of the relevant standing order in the period of the Labor-Greens government, or the Labor government before that, I encourage them to do so. I have plenty of issues with Labor, but the difference was you would get something close to an honest answer. There was a respect for the processes of this place. There was a belief in governing. When we were in government, Mr Speaker, we took the privilege and the responsibility of being ministers of the Crown extremely seriously. It would never have occurred to us to get up here and be dishonest.

This is being included in these sneaky changes to the sessional orders to provide more cover for deception and obfuscation. More cover for ministers who feel free to be loose with the truth when they are at the lectern. Honestly, it is nauseating. As someone who loves parliament, who really values that we are in a Westminster democracy, the spectacle at question time has become totally dispiriting. People who have been here for five minutes, like Mr Ellis, and do not know what it was like before, think it is normal to have ministers get up to the lectern and just not answer questions. They think it is good. They think it is clever. They think that is the way you do parliament. It is just trolling on a Chamber-wide scale. It sets a terrible example to the next generation of political leaders. It is shocking.

I believe the Speaker should have more capacity to pull ministers into line on relevance, because standing order 45 says 'Answers shall be relevant to the question'. It does not say, answers 'might' be relevant, or 'may' be relevant, or 'could' be relevant. It says they 'shall be relevant' to the question. What this should say is that ministers will answer the question honestly. We are in here because we have the great privilege of being elected and we are trusted to raise issues on behalf of our communities and our constituents. One of the ways that we have to do that is question time. I have had to tell some constituents, 'we will ask this question, but I am sorry you will not get a straight answer,' because you never do. I defy Mr Ferguson to tell us when was the last time we received a completely straight answer in here. This is undemocratic. It is unfair. It was done without consultation in a breathtaking display of arrogance and contempt for this place and its conventions.

We are prepared to support Mr Winter's amendment but it is actually not good enough because it will still lead to a restricting of the rights of members who have asked a question. We are supposed to be equal in here, Mr Speaker. I know it is just a technicality, but members who ask a minister a question should be entitled to pull them up if they are not being truthful and are not answering the question; it is a basic principle. It is the way this place has always worked.

This is happening because there is a culture of dishonesty in this Cabinet and a culture of disrespecting the fine traditions of this place. When you do something like this it undermines democracy because it silences dissenting voices, and this is an attempt to silence dissent in here. We saw what happened after 2014 when a vindictive Liberal Party came in here and cut speaking rights all over the place, tried to shut us up again. I believe the problem the Liberals have in understanding the Greens is that the more you try to marginalise us, the more you try to shut us up, the louder we will get, because we are in here to do our job.

This is an abuse of power and Mr Ferguson knows that, otherwise he would have consulted. He knows this is sneaky and dishonest. I realise it has been framed up all week, because we had your good self, Mr Speaker, read out that notice on points of order yesterday, so this has all been carefully choreographed without any reference to just under half the House. I encourage members of the Opposition and the crossbench to take their Standing Orders home with them tonight and study them hard. One thing that Dr Richard Herr said to me when I was first elected was, 'Know your Standing Orders, that's what you've got and it's how you defend your rights in there'.

If Mr Ferguson or any member of the Liberal Party thinks that by doing this they are going to make life easier for themselves in this parliament, they are badly mistaken. They are making life harder for themselves, much harder. When you corner creatures, they will lash out more, so we will be moving that this change be not accepted by the parliament.

I remember saying to Mr Ferguson when that vindictive undermining of the Greens' speaking rights in 2014 happened to be careful how you treat people on your way up the ladder, because you will undoubtedly meet them again on your way back down. That will happen. I look forward to that very much, Mr Speaker. I look forward to seeing ministers who not only treat this place with disrespect but treat Tasmanians with disrespect on the opposition benches. I will relish that moment, because it is so well deserved.

We have a government here that is in disarray. They lost two ministers this year, lost a Braddon MP at the election, had to call an election a year early because they knew what was coming with COVID-19 and they knew they probably would not be re-elected after they had infected so many Tasmanians. We have a government in here that is so on the nose now that it has to have matter of public importance debates about government achievements.

How about there be a culture of respect for question time instituted in government members? Maybe they could go back and have a look at some of the *Hansard* from the days not very long ago when ministers stood at these lecterns and answered the question to the best of their capacity. They have ministers who cannot be honest, ministers who cannot have a look at their disgusting behaviour and apologise for it, a Leader of the House who is having a hissy fit because he does not have the maturity -

Mr SPEAKER - Ms O'Connor, I have to pull you up again on the use of analogies of the minister. I am sure if he said that of you you would be objecting to it.

Ms O'CONNOR - Am I being censored, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER - My point is that if he said you were having a hissy fit, would you object to it?

Ms O'CONNOR - Probably not. Go and have a look at the *Hansard* from this morning.

Mr SPEAKER - You were genuinely talking about respect, but then using language in here that is disrespectful. I remind you of that.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I look forward to you reminding other members of government of that when they use this language towards members of the Opposition or the crossbench. I look forward to that being applied in an even-handed way. An observation expressing an opinion that Mr Ferguson has had a hissy fit is completely parliamentary and in line with many comments that have been made in many debates over many years. I am worried about these semi-regular attempts to try to stop some members from expressing an opinion. I am entitled to describe what is happening here as early onset fascism. It is an opinion. I am entitled, as a mother of four, to observe Mr Ferguson's behaviour and view that as a hissy fit.

I have never seen a motion like this come before the House, Mr Speaker, of such substantial change to the sessional orders that has not been negotiated with other parties. I have never seen it. Step by step, little by little, the traditions and the conventions of this place are being undermined.

Of course we support time limits on questions and answers. Of course we support Mr O'Byrne being able to ask a question and have private members' time, because we strongly believe, passionately, that every member of this place is equal and we are elected on trust. Just because you have the numbers does not make you a little more equal on an individual level than anyone else in here. That overweening sense of self-importance that we get from government members is obvious; they reek of it. We do not support the removal of the relevance point of order. I urge Mr Ferguson to get over himself and have a look at what he is trying to do here because Mr Ferguson will be in opposition again one day and what is he going to try to do? Negotiate with the party of government to have these draconian, undemocratic changes reversed. I do hope that he is shown the hand because that is what he deserves. He lords it around this Chamber like he is the father of the House -

Mr Ferguson - You say that a lot, that is interesting.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is your manner. Through you, Mr Speaker, Mr Ferguson's manner in this place is extraordinarily patriarchal. It is also insulting. The first day we were back this year, Mr Ferguson interjected across the Chamber and told me to disappear. How lovely was that? How utterly charming. He was not pulled up for that interjection, I might note. Told me to just disappear.

I was elected by the people of Clark to stand up here and be their voice, and strongly re-elected, I might say. I am not going to disappear, as much as Mr Ferguson would like me to.

Nor will dissenting voices in this place, whoever is on the opposition or the crossbench, disappear either. I foresee that relations in this Chamber are about to become even more fractious and frustrated, and therefore more toxic, because of changes like this and also, with respect, Mr Speaker, what I think is unequal treatment of members in this place.

We will be supporting Mr Winter's amendment because, at the very least, it means that you do not have the opportunity for government members to take away the one point of order right that a questioner might have. We will also be moving for this to be scratched altogether.

[3.28 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - First of all, Mr Speaker, the amendment from the Labor Party actually deals away the very purpose of the provision, which is in paragraph -

Mr Winter - Gagging. Is that what you mean by the purpose?

Mr FERGUSON - The amendment from Mr Winter deals away the benefit of proposed paragraph (3) because I made it clear earlier that the whole point here is to pick up both elements from the federal Standing Orders and test them here temporarily in the sessional orders, but that they go together.

From the outset, the Government is trying to assist a member not of its own, Mr O'Byrne, who was expelled from the Labor Party caucus, who has found himself in a position where he is unable to ask a question most days. He did go to the Labor Party and was told, 'No, you cannot have one of ours'. That is fine. That is what my understanding was. If I am wrong about it, I will withdraw that.

Second, they go together because I am very committed, as I have said many times, that the official Opposition of the day takes the lead on things like Budget Estimates and question time. Yes, above the crossbench because they are the official Opposition. I have been very consistent on that point standing where I am right now.

I will, in passing, refute the puerile personal reflections that Ms O'Connor so generously makes in this place. She is probably the least respectful member of this House. The way she has been parading around the parliament these last few days, tearing into people, strangers of the House, members of the House, staff members of the departments who have been doing nothing wrong, tearing into them like a real bully -

Ms O'Connor - Except threatening the safety of others. Good people who do not have the respect to put a mask on.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr FERGUSON - The two go together or rather, I should say, paragraphs (2), (3) and (5) go together. I can see why Mr Winter -

Ms O'Connor - We have an adviser without a spleen. Tell them to put their masks on.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. Conversations across the Chamber should cease. I cannot hear what the Leader of the House is saying.

Mr FERGUSON - These three provisions go together and if one was to come out, the other does not work. What we are doing is artificially extending question time as a function of accommodating a guaranteed question a day for crossbench members, Independent members, the Greens. I do not include the Labor Opposition in that generally because I feel that that order be locked in and be a long-term, probably permanent standing order at some future time.

I am aware of the very great dissension that has been expressed around the House from the other side. I do not believe members who have spoken are being fair. Mr O'Byrne was being fair. Members other than him are not being reasonable in accepting that these things are well-intended, are based on precedent and practice in the federal parliament.

Ms O'Connor - No, they are not.

Mr FERGUSON - They are. They do not take away from members' ability to call a point of order on relevance during the answering of a question. Quite honestly, Mr Speaker, I am quite prepared to walk away from the three of them today, no problem, because my greater purpose was to include for Mr O'Byrne the opportunity -

Ms O'Connor - What are you walking away from?

Mr FERGUSON - I am not able to hear you, I am sorry.

Ms O'Connor - What did he say?

Mr FERGUSON - I just cannot hear you. Mr Speaker, my purpose is to deal with the private members' matters, the ability for an Independent member to each obtain the call once per day so paragraphs (2), (3) and (5) go in tandem because I am not prepared to put the Government in a position where you are going to have multiple points of order on the same point of order being asked multiple times in the one answer and still the minister may not have enough time to answer his or her question.

Mr Winter - Do they complain about that?

Mr FERGUSON - They do complain about that.

I will allow Mr Winter's amendment to be dealt with either by division or on the voices and I am quite prepared to move that we will remove paragraphs (2), (3) and (5) from my motion and allow the main object of my purpose here today to be dealt with. I am concerned that if members are not attracted to that, I am not going to fight for it but it was an intention to help question time work better for everyone. I make that point as briefly as I am able right now. If that is agreeable to the House, I will propose that we just move past the amendment and I will move that way.

[3.33 p.m.]

Ms JOHNSTON (Clark) - Mr Speaker, I rise to speak on the amendment proposed by the member for Franklin, Mr Winter, in relation to paragraph (3) of the Government's motion and I indicate my support for the amendment.

I will start by making some generic comments and I will save most of those for my contribution on the substantive motion. I want to reiterate, as my colleagues on the Opposition

and crossbench have, my disappointment that there has been a lack of consultation around the proposal for changes to the sessional orders. The Leader of the House put this motion on the table yesterday when I was, unfortunately, quarantined due to Public Health requirements.

Even though I expected to be back in time for question time in this debate today, I had to wait for my release letter. I am grateful that my release letter came at 6 a.m. this morning, which allowed me to participate in today's parliamentary session. However, it was entirely possible that I would not have received that letter until later today and would not have been able to participate. I may, indeed, have missed this debate entirely.

As an important member of this parliament, and on behalf of my constituents, the wonderful people of Clark, it is an absolute disgrace that there was no prior consultation with me as an Independent member for Clark, the Greens and the Opposition Labor Party, in regard to some significant changes to the sessional orders.

I thank the Leader of the House for his willingness at the start of this session of parliament to continue the arrangements for the previous Independent member for Clark and allow me to have those benefits on behalf of the people of Clark. That was done in a collaborative way, through discussion with the Opposition, the Greens and me. There was a sense of goodwill that we wanted this parliament to work and we wanted everyone to be able to contribute to this parliament. Therefore, it is with a great deal of shame that I came into the office today to discover that the Leader of the House quietly tabled this motion yesterday and intended to bring it on for debate, when there was potential that one key member of the crossbench would not be here to participate and contribute their voice.

I will speak a bit later about the issue around providing additional opportunities for independent members of the crossbench to speak. I want to first say that I support the opportunity for members of parliament to contribute and to ask questions and hold the government to account.

I want to focus my contribution at the moment on the amendment proposed by Mr Winter to paragraph (3). My firm belief is that this is a disgusting fettering of the ability of members to draw the Speaker's attention to matters of process. It is a fundamental, important principle that members of this House can draw the Speaker's attention to errors or issues of process during question time, and ensure that this House can function properly and appropriately.

The purpose of question time is to hold the Government to account. That is why we can only ask questions of ministers. It is for the Opposition and the crossbench to be able to ask questions of the Government on behalf of the Tasmanian community. We know quite well that there is a regular practice of the Government avoiding answers to those questions. Indeed, it is very rare that we actually get an answer, let alone a straight answer, from a minister to a question asked, but that is the function of question time.

I sat and watched question time both on Tuesday and Wednesday from home, due to Public Health orders. I took the opportunity to sit with my 15-year-old son and watch, and it was the first time he had the opportunity to watch question time. I am not one to interject when I am in this Chamber necessarily, but I can tell you now that I was interjecting from my home and yelling at the screen I was watching, and my son was too. His constant question to me was, 'Mum, why isn't the minister able to answer the question? Why are they talking about things that aren't relevant?'. That is a very good question, Mr Speaker, because that is what we

see occur over and over in this place - ministers getting up, reading out an answer to a question, often nowhere near the actual question itself, and just filling in time, ticking down the clock for that hour. It is disrespectful to the member who has asked the question but it is more disrespectful to members of the community who expect the Government be held to account.

My concern, should the Government's motion get up in regard to paragraph (3), is that there will be a fettering of members' ability to draw to the Speaker's attention to an issue of process and ask that the minister be made relevant. It seems to me that when a minister often gives quite a lengthy response to a question, even if it is only four minutes, that one member of the Opposition or crossbench could raise a point of order on relevance under standing order 45, the minister is given the right to continue and the minister completely changes the topic, and abuses the time remaining to them to provide an answer, in which case no other member of this place can raise a point of order.

What Mr Winter has proposed is an entirely sensible and reasonable compromise. If the Leader of the House is genuinely concerned about time during question time and the opportunity for more people to ask questions, then surely allowing each and every member the opportunity to raise a point of order is reasonable and fair. We know that the intent of the Leader of the House with this clause is not to afford more time to the number of questions during question time, it is simply to gag the Opposition and the crossbench.

I will be supporting this amendment. I flag that when we go back to the substantive motion I have an amendment to make to clarify the situation. I reiterate my disappointment that these changes have been proposed without consultation and the lack of respect that entails. I believe there is a desire in this parliament for members of the Opposition and crossbench to work collaboratively to ensure that democracy is strong in this place. I believe we genuinely want to ensure that everyone is heard, but what we have before us is an attempt to gag. I will be supporting Mr Winter's amendment on this because it is fair and reasonable that each member of parliament is given the opportunity to raise a point of order under standing order 45 during question time. I am concerned that a fettering of any member's ability to do that is not democratic and is simply nothing more than a gag motion.

[3.42 p.m.]

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) - Mr Speaker, given what Mr Ferguson has indicated, it is not my intention to take too much of the House's time on this. To be honest, I recall having been caught once before with Mr Ferguson giving a commitment that he would behave in a certain way and then that not being the way it played out, so I am a little nervous about that. I will reiterate that the only reason I am curtailing my comments - and I promise to come back and talk more on the substantive motion if I have to - is that Mr Ferguson has indicated he will only be moving paragraphs (1), (4) and (6) as shared around the House and currently being debated. I am not getting the nod -

Mr Ferguson - That is an appalling commentary you opened with. I am listening to you because I have never welshed on a deal in this place.

Ms O'BYRNE - It was when we were debating termination laws. We had very limited time and you were in the Chamber and said, 'I really just want to make a very few comments so that other members can speak,' and then proceeded to talk for so long that no other members got an opportunity to speak. That is always my reticence with Mr Ferguson, but if he is genuinely offering -

Mr Ferguson - Again, I have never welshed on a deal in here.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'BYRNE - Mr Speaker, I believe I should be afforded the protections that are provided to the other side of the House. If he is genuinely offering to do this as a way for us to get through and to get back onto legislation then I take him at face value for that, noting that we will have an opportunity to debate that if that is not the case.

I want to talk a little about how we found ourselves here. I have been a minister and I understand how frustrating it must be to continually be held to account and to continually have points of order raised. I was listening to the debate in my office and there have been a few things said by people who have been here a little bit longer that significantly need to be addressed. The first is the comment that Mr Ferguson regularly makes that there were six Dorothy Dixers when Labor was in government. I do not know how it played out for Ms O'Connor and her relationship with Mr O'Halloran -

Ms O'Connor - Kim Booth asking me a question was never friendly fire.

Ms O'BYRNE - but I can absolutely tell you that the questions I received from Kim Booth were not Dorothy Dixers -

Ms O'Connor - Me too.

Ms O'BYRNE - and the Government knows that because they worked with Mr Booth on a number of those questions in collusion in order to create things like censure motions in here. The Government knows that is not true and this goes to the heart of the problem we have before us today and the reason people are so concerned about the motion moved today, which Mr Winter is seeking to amend and hopefully will get some good support for that amendment.

For the entire time of the Westminster parliamentary system, there have always been circumstances where ministers might not want to give every bit of information. If you are not asked the question well enough, you are within your right as a minister to address that and avoid the content of the question that you do not want to answer. That has been part of the process for years. Frustrating, annoying - but also part of it.

In my entire time in this parliament, I have never seen what we are now faced with today in question time. Like Mr Ferguson, I also served in the federal parliament, and I have also been in Mr Ferguson's job - I have been the Leader of Government Business. There have always been circumstances where you might not obtain every bit of information that you asked for but I have never been in a parliament that has sought to behave in the way that this parliament has behaved: the refusal to address matters and hiding behind a standing order which is not designed to give the outcome that this Government uses. I have read the background to it and I can tell you why it is important that we do have confidence in the processes. The fact that there was an amendment moved today to say that we could not raise points of order actually goes to the heart of the problem. There is a belief the politicians always obey the most essential political principle. There is one political principle that ministers particularly have to obey, and that is the law of anticipated reaction - or consequence, as we would think of it.

The law of anticipated reactions, or consequences, is one of the reasons ministers are very careful to make sure they are across their entire portfolio and everything they sign. It is one of the reasons ministers make sure they know what is going on and that when they stand in this House they can, hand on heart, honestly and decently answer questions.

To explain that simply, we may never get hit by a car when we cross the road, but the fact that we think that we might get hit means that we are careful when we cross the road. We may never want to say something untrue in this parliament. The fact that we are scared that we might say something untrue means we do not say something untrue in this parliament. That is no longer the case, and that is the frustration that leads us to where we are today.

It is Mr Ferguson's frustration in the continual points of order. It is the frustration displayed by you, Mr Speaker, when you said you were sick and tired of it in question time today. We are sick and tired of it too. I would love question time to be over in an hour, so I can go and do the other things I have to do. That used to be the case, but because this Government treats it with such contempt, we damage the very Westminster system that is the reason we are able to behave and conduct our business in the way we do. I realise Westminster parliaments are different across the world. The one constant they have is that ministers do not come into the House and deliberately seek to walk out without being honest and truthful. Whether there are always untruths told is a matter of debate. We can refer to the many times I have stood here and listed the times that ministers have gone to the lectern and admitted later on that they went there knowing they were about to say something that was untrue, and they are sorry about it, but they are not going to change it.

Once upon a time, if you did so, that was it. You walked in here and resigned. You handed in your commission to the Governor, the Queen's representative. That is what the Westminster system means. If we continue to make a mockery of our parliament, I do not know where we will end up.

I have been genuinely distressed this last couple of weeks - although it probably started last year - at what I see as the demolition of a democracy that I hold dear. Ms O'Connor said there are new members here who think this is normal. It is terrible that you think this might be normal. This is not a normal way for governments to behave, nor is it a normal way for parliaments or democracies to behave. It is the reason why we find ourselves in trouble.

I have a couple of copies of *Erskine May*. They give them to you in federal parliament to make sure you know the rules. I looked at the provisions about asking questions and what it is that you are supposed to do in your answer - because it is important that your question is precise. I share your frustration; really long questions provide a whole lot of open doors. I do not mind keeping them tight.

The *Companion to Standing Orders and Rules* says that from time to time it is claimed that ministers may answer questions in any way they wish. The claim is of course tempered by the obligation for ministers to conduct themselves in accordance with standing orders, and making political points only vaguely relevant to the question is clearly in breach of standing orders.

It is the function of the Speaker to ensure a fair balance at all times. I cannot imagine how difficult it is - I have never sat in the Speaker's chair. However, I remember as a minister, if I was not relevant, if I took too much time, I was sat down. When Mr Polley was Speaker,

I argued about it on many occasions. I thought it was completely unfair that he would sit me down all the time, but that is what happened. If I was not relevant, if I was not answering the question fast enough, if he did not think anybody was listening to the answer, I would be sat down. That leads to the frustration we have today. The substantive motion has some good intent.

I consider crossbench members should be able to have equal and fair access, and that is a really good provision. I understand Ms Johnston is going to move an amendment. I am not sure the amendment fundamentally changes it but if that makes people happy then we should be flexible, when we can.

However, we need to reflect upon the reason we found ourselves here and the damage that it is doing to all of us. We do not look good, or trusted, in the community. There is an old line, 'when the parliament is in in chaos, it reflects badly on the government'. It reflects badly on me too, and I do not like that, because I hold this place dear. I am distressed about the way the parliament behaves now, and if we do not take an opportunity to catch ourselves -

Mr Ferguson - Have a look at yourselves.

Ms O'BYRNE - Mr Ferguson, I will take that interjection; even though I understand that we interject and you have banter. This is part of the unravelling. There are times when we should reflect on our behaviour, and I do. I also note that this is not the way this parliament has behaved before and we need to look for the causal reasons for that.

Mr Speaker, I am sure you do not want to preside over the sort of behaviours we have had in this parliament. If we were all doing our jobs properly you would not have to. If ministers were relevant, and answered questions, we would not have any reason to jump into a point of order. We do it because the situation is created, and unless every member of this House starts to take some responsibility for it, then we will be consigning this parliament to a very dark future. We have all seen the pictures, sent across the world, of parliaments that are rabble, violent and unruly. Our democracy protects us.

In conclusion, I will relate a story which is probably not relevant, but it goes to why democracy matters.

I have done some work with politicians in Rwanda, where a million people died in 100 days. When they established their new parliament in the Westminster system, they had such a strong commitment to make sure that democracy works. Is it perfect? Probably not; we can all find instances across many nations where things go wrong. However, they were committed to making sure their parliamentary process and their democracy worked. They have over 60 per cent of women because they believe women solve problems. You might not think that looking at me; but I believe that too.

Also, if you become a minister you resign your seat - you can never be seen to be promoting your local community above that of anyone else. I spoke to some Rwandan politicians, including one man who said, 'I can sit across the table from the person who ordered the attack on my family, and I could sit next to the person who conducted the attack on my family'. I asked him how he could do that, and how their democratic process and meeting times in parliament allows him to do that. He said because if I do not, 1 million people will die in

100 days. It is an extreme example of what happens when democracy fails, but they started from a lower base than us.

We had a very high standard in this House. It was not always perfect, but it was a pretty high standard, and we have to find a way to get back there.

I understand why Mr Ferguson has moved that particular motion, but if we are calling for self-reflection, Mr Ferguson has to reflect on why he had to move it. This matters. We have to get better. We look foolish, childish and irresponsible. We look as though we are not fit to do the job that Tasmanian people ask of us - and it is about time we were.

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

The House divided -

AYES 9

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

NOES 10

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

PAIRS

Ms Finlay
Mr Winter

Mr Gutwein
Mr Tucker

Amendment negatived.

Mr SPEAKER - We are back on the main question.

[4.01 p.m.]

Ms JOHNSTON (Clark) - Mr Speaker, I note that we are back onto the substantive motion. I also note that the Leader of the House has expressed intent to withdraw components of the motion, so I will not deal with those particular parts. I will speak more generally about my disgust at the level of disrespect shown to the Opposition and crossbench members in the way this matter has been sprung upon us.

I support strengthening the crossbench and the ability for members of the crossbench to ask questions. I welcome the opportunity for the Independent member for Franklin, Mr O'Byrne, to have time to raise matters on behalf of his constituents. It is also important for Opposition members to be able to do so. I note that this is the first formal recognition by this parliament of Mr O'Byrne as the Independent member for Franklin. I put on record my

concerns that if these sessional orders are passed, Mr O'Byrne will be described as an Independent member, when there is some confusion about the status of what is 'independent'.

My view is that the Independent member for Franklin - if we have to call him that - is not a true independent. I looked on the Australian Labor Party website at lunchtime today, and noted that Mr O'Byrne is clearly described as a member of Franklin for Labor, along with Mr Winter and Ms Julie Collins, the federal member for Franklin. Mr O'Byrne's office is still branded as Labor, and Mr O'Byrne still often refers to himself as the Labor member for Franklin. He is referred to in the media as the Labor member for Franklin, and not corrected.

I am concerned that we have a member of the crossbench with a foot in the Labor Opposition camp, and with all the benefits of being aligned and associated with a political party, but also a foot in the independent crossbench camp. I put on record my concerns about the appropriateness of this. If Mr O'Byrne, or anyone in this place, would like to become a true independent and sit on the crossbench with me, I would welcome that. I would love to see more true independents on the crossbench and indeed in this place, but that is not what we have here.

What we have is a blatant case of double dipping. I appreciate that the Labor caucus has decided -

Ms WHITE - Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to draw the member's attention to the motion that is being debated before the Chair. I believe she is digressing.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - The independent member for Clark will continue.

Ms JOHNSTON - I understand that the Labor caucus has decided that Mr O'Byrne is not part of that but for members of the public who look at who represent them in this place, there is confusion. As an Independent member and a person who takes that independent brand very seriously, that needs to be sorted out. It is not necessarily a matter that can be dealt with through the sessional orders and I appreciate that. But I want to place -

Mr WINTER - Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, standing order 142 (e). The member is digressing and, in fact, just admitted digressing very far from the subject under discussion. I ask you to draw her back to what we are actually dealing with.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Thank you, leader of Opposition business. The Independent member for Clark can continue.

Ms JOHNSTON - Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am not digressing. It is a matter of importance for the sessional order in how we describe members in this place. We are intending to adopt changes for sessional orders which would describe another person in this place as an 'Independent' member. That goes to the heart of what that means. While the sessional orders proposed may not deal with that definition at this particular time, it is important for clarity, for how these sessional orders may be interpreted in the future, that there is some certainty about what is an Independent member in this place and who gets to call themselves an Independent member.

I will support paragraph (1) in relation to the granting of the Independent member for Franklin's private members' time because I believe it is important. However, I urge some

clarity, perhaps from the Independent member for Franklin himself, or the Opposition leader, about the branding of that because I do not want to cause greater confusion in the community about this.

I will also move an amendment to paragraph (6) of the substantive motion.

Leave out all words after the word 'each' and insert instead:

'by the Independent Member for Clark, Independent Member for Franklin if such Members seek the call.'

My reason for doing this is because it is important that we are explicit in who we are referring to as Independent members in these sessional orders. I appreciate that the words have been amended since it was first tabled under Government Business from 'and' to 'each' and I appreciate that change.

This might seem like semantics but it is important that we do not leave it to trust, that we be very clear in sessional orders that it is intended that 'each' Independent member, the Independent member for Clark, the Independent member for Franklin, gets one question each during question time. Given the concerns from the Opposition, if I understand correctly, and members of the Greens about the way this parliament has been conducting itself, particularly in question time, and perhaps the lack of trust and respect shown during question time, it is important that we have this clarity in these sessional orders. Therefore, I will be moving that it be amended to specifically mention both the Independent member for Clark and the Independent member for Franklin so that it is abundantly clear, when it comes to question time, who we are referring to.

I will leave my contribution there. I urge members of this House to take that amendment in good faith. It is just about making it clear for the purposes of sessional orders and to avoid confusion.

[4.09 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I will stay at my seat. I will speak on Ms Johnston's proposed amendment.

I say with the greatest of respect to Ms Johnston that I feel Mr O'Byrne is obviously an elected Labor member who is not part of the parliamentary Labor Party, who does not sit with the Opposition. I believe it is reasonable that he be treated as an Independent member and treated equally to every other member in this place.

Mr O'Byrne's Franklin constituents are entitled to be given voice in here. The people who voted for Mr O'Byrne did so because they wanted him to be their voice. Obviously, there is a history here; there have been some behaviours that are a matter of public record. However, I have not felt comfortable in question time watching Mr O'Byrne be denied the opportunity to ask questions. It makes me feel a bit squiggly inside at the end of question time when he seeks the call and it is not given. There is the world the way we would like it to be and the world the way it is, and it is very reasonable and, in fact, necessary for Mr O'Byrne to be given more rights in this place.

I hear what Ms Johnston is saying and I know that there is all manner of shades of 'independent'. I regard Ms Johnston as a true Independent member for Clark. I do not regard her predecessor as the Independent member for Clark because Ms Ogilvie sat in this place and was clearly not an actual independent because every time it counted she voted with the Government -

Ms Ogilvie - I voted with you on climate change. You liked that, I remember.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, you did vote with us once or twice, when your vote made no difference to the outcome in a parliament where we had a notionally independent Speaker there. The only time Ms Ogilvie voted with us was when her vote was not a deciding vote. While Ms Ogilvie could have used her vote in a true balance-of-power sense to make some real shifts in public policy or real improvements to legislation, she chose not to. Any time Ms Ogilvie voted with us I knew it was a stitch-up so that she could virtue-signal in the community but not cause any disruptions to the government of the day. That is a matter of record.

There has been all manner of independents in this place. I personally would like to see more independents in here. I would like to see the House restored to 35 so you have a genuine democratic parliament with enough talent all round for us to improve the level of debates, and also the quality of Cabinet and the backbench.

I am pleased that Mr O'Byrne will have some rights to questions and rights to a private member's time. It is fair.

In terms of Ms Johnston's amendment, paragraph (6) as it is written is that:

Sessional Order 48A be amended by leaving out 'the Independent Member for Clark if such Member seeks the call', and insert instead, 'each Independent Member, if such Members seek the call'.

I guess the change that is proposed in the motion makes it more generic. The original motion we had was extremely worrying because it did not say 'each individual member'. The printed version, which was on the website this morning, said "and insert instead 'an Independent Member if such members seek the call'". There has been something lost in translation.

I was very concerned that we were setting up a dynamic where Ms Johnston and Mr O'Byrne would have to fight to get that question. I am glad that has been resolved. I am not uncomfortable with Ms Johnston's amendment, but I consider that the section of the motion as it is worded is sufficient for the purpose because it makes sure that each of the Independent members will have the opportunity to ask a question every question time.

I simply urge, whoever is in the Chair, to apply standing order 122, which is that the call is given to the member who rose first. That standing order is applied in an extremely arbitrary way, no matter who is in the Chair. I am not reflecting on any particular Speaker or Deputy Speaker, but invariably, even when the Greens clearly rose first, we are not given the call.

During question time it would be respectful if first, we apply standing order 122 with more consistency and fairness and, second, that the Independent members are not relegated to the back end of question time after we have had to deal with four Dorothy Dixers. In the case of Ms Johnston, what happens quite often is that there are two questions from the Opposition;

then the Greens get a question; and even if Ms Johnston jumps first, quite often a Dorothy Dix is awarded and then it goes back to Labor - and after that, Ms Johnston might get a question.

Ms Ogilvie - She gets question five the same as me. I may be wrong but that is what I have noticed.

Ms O'CONNOR - There is a change. Ms Hickey used to quite regularly give you the call before a Dorothy Dix.

Ms Ogilvie - Yes, she did and then she changed. You are right.

Ms O'CONNOR - On any given day, Ms Hickey would have either a different view, or a different approach to how she should conduct herself.

Ms Ogilvie - You are right.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Order.

Ms O'CONNOR - I would like to see the Independent members not relegated in question time. They should be treated with the respect that they deserve, that we all deserve, and that their constituents deserve. I encourage Mr Speaker or the Chair of Committees to make sure that respect is demonstrated. If there are more acts of respect towards Opposition and crossbench parties in this place, whether it be from the Chair or ministers, you might find there is a positive feedback loop. You never know.

Part of the reason that the House has become so unruly, and part of the reason that Dr Woodruff and I are so frustrated in here is because of the way we are treated and because Government members get away with all manner of interjections and heckling and not answering questions and all sorts of behaviours, and lord it around this Chamber. It can be done better.

I am comfortable with Ms Johnston's amendment. If there is a vote on it, we will vote for it, but I do not consider that the motion loses anything by its current wording.

[4.19 p.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak to a number of things in the Independent Member for Clark's contribution. A number of PhDs have been written about Independents in politics - who are genuine Independents, who are not Independents, who are non-aligned - this is not the place to resolve that.

People are elected to this House and there is a party affiliation, so you are aligned to a party or you are not aligned to a party. I am not seeking to redefine that here. I do not call myself 'Independent'. I call myself the Member for Franklin. I am in a unique set of circumstances. Yes, I am a rank and file member of the Labor Party; I have not hidden from that. I have made that very clear.

However, blind Freddy could see that I am not in the Parliamentary Labor Party. I am not a member of the caucus. People know that very clearly. If there is some insinuation that I am like a fifth columnist or I am doing the deeds of the PLP, that is not the case. I am now acting independently, calling on my values as a Labor member for many years but values that

I hold as a community member and a member of the Labor movement. That is what dictates my actions in this House. I do not pretend to be a member of the PLP.

If you have any understanding of the Labor Party and the different elements of how decisions are made and the various roles of state and federal parliamentary wings, it is a bit different. You cannot view us as one bloc. There are different elements of the Labor movement.

Having said that, I do not refer to myself as a Labor member. I refer to myself as the member for Franklin. I do that on my email block, my media releases and my social media presence. It is very clear that whilst I am a rank and file Labor member, I do not speak for the Parliamentary Labor Party in this place. Let us be clear about that.

I have not asked for the wording 'Independent member for Franklin' to be used in these standing orders. I suggest the wording is being used because in the Hare-Clark context, there is a number of members of Franklin in the House. You are either the Labor member, the Liberal member, or the Greens member for Franklin. The use of the term 'independent' is not so much a definition of political position. It is more a definition of the role I play within the Hare-Clark environment. It is sensible that I be referred to in the standing orders as the Independent member for Franklin, although I do not, for all intents and purposes, refer to myself as Independent in the public domain. I do not seek to use that as a brand in the current environment and the unique circumstances that I am in.

I do not disagree with the amendment. One thing that I have learnt, particularly over the last period of time is that politics moves very quickly. My view is that it is better to just refer to it as the 'independent members', because a week is a long time in politics. Twelve months could be a long time in politics. We could potentially be back here having a debate about another independent member for one of the other seats.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Name them.

Mr O'BYRNE - Mr Ellis is quite a character. You never know, he may get himself into a bit of strife. I suggest it makes it more flexible for the floor if they are not referred to as 'Independent member' for Clark or Franklin, but they are 'Independent members'. A non-aligned member in this House should be referred to under the standing orders as Independent. The outside political branding is a matter for another day.

Whilst I am not against it, I suggest it may be sensible if we do not; but I am not going to die in a ditch about it. Mr Deputy Speaker, I hope that clarifies my position on this.

[4.23 p.m.]

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make some comments on the substantive motion because I have not had a chance to do that yet. I recognise that the Leader of the House has indicated he will be removing paragraphs (2), (3) and (5) from the motion that has been put before the House. I seek guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker, about the process by which the Leader of Government Business will do that - is it through a motion to amend?

Mr Ferguson - An amendment motion after this amendment is dealt with.

Ms WHITE - Thank you. This motion was a bit of a stalking horse for the Government to try to change other standing orders, in particular the use of standing order 45. It is unfortunate that we are not able to progress the other elements of the motion, namely, time limits for questions asked and answered. It would have been helpful to have given some greater clarity to those two elements. However, the unfortunate reality for this Government to front up to is that we would not need to rely on standing order 45 as often, if they were a better Government, and could come to the dispatch box and be honest in their answers.

In fact, I had considered moving a further amendment to standing order 45, to require that when ministers do provide an answer, they are not only relevant but they are also honest.

The danger the Government runs when they use motions like this as stalking horses to move amendments to other standing orders without consultation, and without taking it to the Standing Orders Committee, is that parliament then looks at other standing orders that they might also like to improve upon.

In good faith, I will not be doing anything like that, given that the minister and Leader of the House have decided to withdraw those particular clauses. However, I make the point that should the Government seek to do things like this in the future, without consultation and without going through an appropriate process, this parliament might have a different view and might choose to use that opportunity to look at other standing orders or other amendments that could be moved to standing orders in future motions.

The amendment moved by the member for Clark, Ms Johnston, makes paragraph (6) a bit clunky. It is the view of the Labor Party that it is unnecessary, and that the wording as put in the Government's motion is entirely appropriate, particularly given that I understand that it now reads 'each Independent Member if such Members seek the call', which would mean the independent members would not need to compete with one another to get a question; they would both be granted that opportunity each question time.

Therefore, we will not support the amendment moved by the member for Clark. In fact, the way you behaved was a bit unfortunate, given the debate that has already been held on this matter today. I had wondered what that amendment was about and then it was revealed; and that is also why we will not be supporting it.

[4.27 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Speaker, I am entirely agnostic on the matter, but will favor the motion as it is already worded. All these paragraphs were drafted for me by our Clerk. My only critique is that I would not have capitalised the letter 'i' in 'independent', because that is a brand. However, that is by the bye. It is exactly as Mr O'Byrne outlined as to why we would have it worded in this way because it is Hare-Clark, so you have more than one member for an electorate. It indicates that, while Mr O'Byrne has a foot in each camp in terms of party status, because he is a member of an organisation party but not a member of a parliamentary party, he is, for the purposes of this House currently seen as an independent member. It is as simple as that.

I favor the current wording. I do not see any meaningful change, only a different way to express it. Is that fair? The same outcome would apply. It was a clarification that the Clerk was able to make, to ensure the word 'each' is there only for the purpose of clarity. I would prefer that we agree on the current wording and there should not be a need for a vote.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - Member for Clark. Apologies, member for Clark, I am reminded that you do not get an opportunity for a right of reply. That being the case the question is that the amendment be agreed to.

Amendment negatived.

[4.29 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of the House) - Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the motion be amended to remove paragraphs (2), (3) and (5).

I have never broken a promise in this House that I have made to any of the political parties in the eight years that I have been fulfilling this role as Leader of the House. Not once. In fact, in this new parliament, since the last May election, I have even honoured sessional orders arrangements that I agreed with Ms O'Connor in the previous parliament. Sessional orders apply to the session only, for those who may not be fully aware of what I mean by that. A session is a period between proroguing. You can have four years or a lesser period of time.

Ms O'Connor, I invite you to see the good grace in that. We have never stiffed you on a deal and I never will. The same goes for the independent member for Clark, Ms Johnston.

I have not found the need to workshop and negotiate with people, other than Mr O'Byrne, on this matter before us today because nobody else's rights were being cut off at all. I will stand on my digs on it because that was not the intent, as it has been variously described by members here. I am quite happy to walk past it and I will not bring it up again, because I am not interested. The whole point was to help the House to improve the conduct and timeliness of question time.

Ms O'Byrne, who has left the Chamber, has given one of the more thoughtful contributions today which I will have a think about myself. I appreciated what she said, except for the bit where she claimed I had broken a promise. I did not agree with that. But that is by the bye. I welcome those comments from Ms O'Byrne and it does not hurt any of us, in a period of humility, to do some self-reflecting on how well we think we are going in here. I do not think we are going well and it needs to go better. This discussion would be far better held not in this Chamber, in a way. I do not mean the Standing Orders Committee. I mean in a far more social, off-the-record discussion about how we think we are really going here.

Ms O'Connor - You could have done that.

Mr FERGUSON - I am not talking about the Standing Orders, Ms O'Connor - I am talking about us. I am talking about some of the appalling things that have occurred increasingly in recent times that have hurt all of us, I think it is fair to say. I am trying to be as fair as I can about that. I have seen some appalling behaviours. Many will be sitting there thinking, 'Well, Mr Ferguson, you are part of that'. Fine, you can think that -

Ms Butler - We have certainly been subjected to some appalling behaviours. You have been really horrible at times in this House.

Mr FERGUSON - No, Ms Butler, I am speaking about Ms O'Byrne's contribution and my response to it.

Ms Butler - You have been just as bad.

Mr FERGUSON - Ms Butler, once again, you bring nothing to a debate then you interject. You are doing it again.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will say it again because Ms O'Byrne is here. I will say it to you personally, Ms O'Byrne. I appreciate what you had to say. I believe I can agree with you that we can do better in a whole range of ways, in ways that cannot be codified by Standing Orders as well. It does trouble me, and my colleagues in my party will be more than aware of the concerns I have been raising about how our House of Assembly is going. There is scrutiny and then there is abuse. There has been a lot of discussion today about name-calling and I am glad that has been done. There has been a lot of discussion today about respect and I am glad that that has been stated as well. This will absolutely cut more than one way. It will apply to all of us, Government, Opposition, crossbench.

I want to walk through the door that Ms O'Byrne has opened: I invite people to show more grace and I will endeavour to do the same. We can do a better job because we have important work to do in this place. We all know it. We have vitally important legislation, things that are of immediate value and importance to Tasmanians and long term for future generations of our state. We let them down when we call each other names. We let them down when - and I am not talking about difficult questions of ministers - our standard of good ethical behaviour between each other, the language we use to engage each other. I know that some will be feeling that I am trying to point my comments at them personally. I am trying not to do that.

I would like to walk through that door and say I think that there is a period of self-reflection for members of all of our parties, members of our House of Assembly. I do not want to invite ridicule for what I have said. I would like to say to Ms White, Ms O'Byrne, Ms O'Connor, my own team, and Ms Johnston, when this place is at its best, there is a really strong debate with strong points of view based on values and priorities that are very different. However, we have to cut out the abuse, we just have to.

I will not entertain any further how we got here. Mr O'Byrne ought to be able to ask questions as a member for Franklin. He ought to be able to do some private members' time every fourth week of sitting weeks. He will not have to do so on the same Wednesday as Ms Johnston because our clever Clerk has devised a week A and a week B. I will just commend the motion to the House, and I appreciate, actually, where we have arrived between each other.

[4.36 p.m.]

Mr WINTER (Franklin) - Mr Deputy Speaker, Labor will be supporting the proposed amendment from the Leader of the House because it is better than when I stood up at the start of this debate, when it did impinge on members' rights. The Leader of the House just told us that no other rights would be impacted, or words to that effect, during his contribution but what was proposed here was to take away the rights of members to raise very legitimate points of order that often, sadly, need to be raised in this place. Members have every right to raise points of order, and I know this side of the House will continue to do so when the Standing Orders, in our view, are being breached.

We will be supporting this because it is better. It is a shame that the amendment will drop the requirement to keep questions at less than a minute. It is a shame that it will stop

ministers from going on after four minutes. I do not agree with the Leader of the House that the three of those things had to go together. Some of them had merit. The one that did not have merit and was completely unacceptable to the Opposition was the curtailing of the rights of members to raise points of order under standing order 45, which we are perfectly entitled to do when we see ministers digressing from the question. Rights would have been impacted.

I agree with the Leader of the House that this place and this parliament needs to be better. I also invite him to use that self-reflection in some of the behaviours that we have seen today and in the way that this matter has been handled. I have been working with the Leader of the House for, I think, 10 years this year. Right from the start we acknowledged that we were on opposite sides of the political spectrum. I had been associated with and was a member of the Labor Party and he was a Liberal. He was the shadow minister for ICT at the time. We worked together with mutual respect for that entire time. I have been disappointed with the way this matter has been dealt with by the Leader of the House because, as he said, this could have been dealt with in a conversation in an informal manner. Of course, it could have been.

We have been here now since 2.30 p.m., for over two hours, on something that could have probably been sorted out in the Long Room over a cup of coffee. Yet here we are, with two hours having elapsed on this debate, on an issue that we could have sat around and discussed civilly. That is disappointing. I hope that it changes and goes back to the respectful engagement that I felt we were heading towards last year. Certainly, it has been a disappointing way to deal with an issue that should have been dealt with better.

We support the ability for all members to ask questions. It is an important part of democracy, it is an important part of Hare-Clark and we are glad this matter is being resolved. We stand ready, perhaps next time, to deal with this a little better.

[4.40 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Deputy Speaker, it is really regrettable we have been given a false choice because what could have happened here is the Leader of Government Business, having realised what a mistake it was to try to take away members' rights to raise a point of order, could have simply said - I move paragraph (3). I do not buy the argument these are connected in that way and that they are necessarily connected.

Members might remember when the parliament returned after the premature election last year, we tried to get time limits on questions and answers put into the sessional orders and we were voted down by the Government. There should be time limits on questions and answers. The Greens would be very happy to keep our questions to a minute or less.

Mr Winter - You could do that voluntarily though.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, we do. It is rare we run over a minute. Just tactically, I appreciate it is actually better to ask a minister a short, sharp question quickly so they do not have maximum time to cook up some faux answer. There is no argument for having an answer to a question from the minister running for more than four minutes. It is a basic time of communication. If you cannot respond to a question and lay out that answer and your argument in succinct and fact-rich terms in four minutes or less you are in the wrong job.

I too, very much, appreciate Ms O'Byrne's contribution and that wealth of experience and the big brain Ms O'Byrne brings to debates here. Obviously, I am going to reflect on her

contribution and the points made, but Mr Deputy Speaker, as you well know, we have been called terrorists. We have been called vegan terrorists, eco-terrorists. I was told by the Leader of Government Business on the first day back of this session to disappear. As Greens we cop constant abuse. The *Hansard* record shows that.

It is very easy to put the boot into the Greens in this place and we will always stand up for ourselves because we have to. You cannot cave in when people are attacking you like that. That is part of the reason why Dr Woodruff and I are occasionally ejected from this Chamber: it is out of frustration. Mostly it is our frustration at not being able to get straight answers out of ministers. If I had to distil the greatest source of frustration for Dr Woodruff and me in here, it is not being able to discern the truth by asking a minister for a truthful answer to a question. It can be quite mind-numbing.

I do not put all of the blame for this cultural change on the current Premier, because under the previous premier, standards were allowed to slip. And they slipped fast. There was a new cynicism that overlaid the workings of this place. This has been going on since 2014. It has. I know Mr Ferguson does not like to be reminded of this, but I remember what the Liberals were like in opposition. They were savage, nasty. We did the maths a while back - I cannot remember the exact number but - dozens of hours dedicated to censure and no confidence motions: a government that was trying to steer this state through a global recession and somehow hold it together in the public interest, the weekly censure and no confidence motions we endured. Not only did we endure them, we let them run. We voted for the seeking of leave, voted for the suspension and then we endured the debate.

Maybe Ms O'Byrne has a better memory of this, but I do not remember us gagging the debate. We appreciated if there is a question before the House of censure or confidence, the House needs to be able to talk that through. You do not get a clear and decisive outcome when something is gagged just because the government of the day has used its numbers to vote it down following the censure motion.

It is really different now and I encourage new and younger members of this place, if they do not have anything better to do, but also if they want to inform themselves about the way it used to be when you had real respect for the conventions and the traditions of this place, to go back and look at the pre-2014 *Hansard*.

It was a different set of standards then. Not perfect, definitely not perfect, but we keep getting told, for example, by Mr Ferguson, this myth of there being six 'Dorothy Dix' questions. I never once got a friendly question from Kim Booth. You and me both, Ms O'Byrne. Nor did I get any warning as minister. I did not know what was coming. With Mr Booth in here, like dealing with the opposition, I just never knew.

Ms O'Byrne - I never knew what Basil was going to ask either, if that just clarifies the record.

Ms O'CONNOR - Basil might have alluded to something with me but, I am being honest with you. Basil might have said, 'I have this project, and I would like to ask you a question about that'. That is different from having a scripted question prepared by a department or a minister's office that is designed only to give the minister an opportunity to spruik. The previous honourable member for Braddon, Mr Paul 'Basil' O'Halloran, used to throw curve

balls at me as well, but they were never thrown hoping to knock me out like some others. It is simply untrue.

Mr Ferguson - Was it mutual?

Ms O'CONNOR - I would prefer if you do not have something nice to say about someone you used to work with, maybe do not say anything. It is untrue to say there were six 'Dorothy Dix' questions to government members in the Labor-Greens government because it was a unique arrangement where there were two ministers in the Cabinet and then the Greens still as the crossbench party. Tim Morris, Kim Booth and Paul O'Halloran were not in the Cabinet and were able to ask questions as they should. It is untrue, and I encourage Mr Ferguson, if he wants the tone of this place to improve, to stop dropping fibs like that.

Mr Ferguson - But it is true. Basil was Nick's parliamentary secretary and asked him questions numerous times.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is untrue to say they were Dorothy Dix questions about which we were always warned. Let us be honest - you people award yourselves four a day. What is wrong with a Greens minister getting a question from another Greens MP to elucidate on Greens policy, or legislation, or other issues? It was not abused. Whereas now, it is abused. Go back and have a look at how Dorothy Dix questions, as we colloquially call them, began. It is intended to be, in a robust Westminster parliament, an opportunity for the government backbench to bring questions on behalf of their constituencies up to the parliament. It was about giving backbenchers the opportunity to genuinely represent their constituents. That is not what we get now, we simply do not get that. The tone of the Dorothy Dix question is actually boring: can the minister please tell us how terrific she is, and is she aware of any other people who are as terrific as her? And Labor is bad.

Ms O'Byrne - The template.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is a template question, and it is insulting to our intelligence in here, it is insulting to taxpayers. When people in the community hear that the Government asks itself four questions every day, they shake their heads in disbelief.

Mr Ferguson knows as well as we do that Dorothy Dix questions do not have public support. He knows that very well. Any time this issue comes up, and creates a public conversation, the Government pretends it is not happening because they know it will go away and they will not change it anyway.

I consider we are being given a false choice here. There should be time limits on answers and questions, and we should have the right to ask points of orders. In the spirit of reconciliation, if that is possible, I hope that Mr Ferguson did not insert paragraph (3), knowing what the response would be, as a way of signalling 'Oh, yes, we will do something about time limits but only if you trade away your rights to raise a point of order'. I hope that level of cynicism is not within this motion to change the sessional orders. It is not true, Mr Ferguson, that no-one else's were being cut off at all. That is exactly the words you said: 'nobody else's rights were being cut off at all'. That is completely untrue, totally false.

Mr Ferguson - I stand by it. I will, and I have articulated that.

Ms O'CONNOR - Again, this capacity to say black is white, good is bad; it is this thing conservatives do where you give them a fact, or put a truth in front of them, and they go, 'It is simply not true' and move on. And you say 'Well, how is it not true, that nobody else's rights were being taken away at all when you were seeking to remove our rights to raise a point of order in question time'? What I said is patently true. It is true that there was an attempt to take away some of our rights.

Mr Ferguson - I have explained all this.

Ms O'CONNOR - No, you did not explain all that; you asserted something. You did not explain your argument. We get that a lot from Government too, or from Government backbenchers. Make a crazy statement, or an un-evidenced based statement, drop it out there, and walk away without making an argument. You would lose high school debating - many of you people would have been on the losing team.

Mr Winter - I was terrible. We lost all the time.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Winter, maybe it was because you were shy.

Mr Winter - No, it was an all boys school, and the all girls school used to destroy us.

Ms O'CONNOR - Now I believe you. I wish we were not being presented with this false choice, Mr Deputy Speaker. The community would expect that there be limits on how long ministers can stand at the lectern. It has been a long time since I have timed a Dorothy Dix question that has come in under five minutes. Invariably, they are between four and a half and six minutes long. If the Dorothy Dix questions stop at four and a half minutes, because we get dulled to these things, I think 'that was a reasonably short response, I will not call standing order 48 - sufficient time'.

There is no excuse for ministers blabbering on and we know that in many ways, it is buying time. I have seen ministers stand at that lectern and look at the clock, and if it is three minutes to eleven they will talk it out so there is not another opportunity for a question. I have seen it any number of times.

Mr Ferguson - Absolutely.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes, it is cynical. It is about self-preservation, because they do not want what I heard Mr Ferguson refer to as 'hostile questions'. I understand when you are in Government how they feel hostile. I remember what it was like to sit there and brace yourself and be a little bit scared. I do remember that. One day, hopefully, there will be a good, solid look at the standing orders and a collaborative process where we can work through how it might be improved. Obviously, the Standing Orders Committee is not functioning as it was intended and none of the crossbench is on that committee. That was part of the changes in 2014, when the Greens were thoroughly shafted, and it has, I suggest, made us even more difficult in here; but that is one for you, Mr Ferguson. The Standing Orders need some examination. I believe the changes made by the Clerk of the House in the past year or so, that modernised the Standing Orders, were really robust. That was a consultative process.

These are the rules that govern all of us, as individual MPs, so we should be part of the conversation about how they operate and how they might be improved. We should have been

part of the conversation on this motion. Mr Winter is absolutely right: we could have dealt with this in half an hour, after the lunch break and we would right now be debating a bill to strengthen Tasmania's climate act. However, because Mr Ferguson is angry with us - and he is, I know that, and that is okay, that is human - we did not have those conversations and so parliament's time has blown out debating these changes to the sessional orders.

I am not going to divide on this proposed amendment from Mr Ferguson, but I do not support it, because we should have time limits on answers, time limits on questions and we should have our rights to raise points of order preserved, within the rules of this House.

[4.59 p.m.]

Ms JOHNSTON (Clark) - Mr Deputy Speaker, we have already spent two-and-a-half hours discussing this, so I will keep my comments brief. I will be supporting the amendment proposed by the Leader of the House, because as I said at the outset, I support the right of independent members to have the opportunity to ask questions and for them to have private member's time and that is very clear.

I also put on the record that I am grateful to the independent member for Franklin, Mr O'Byrne for the clarification - that he would like to be referred to as an independent member for Franklin, for the purposes of standing orders, if I understand that correctly, but does not consider himself to be an Independent member. I thank him for that clarification because what we call ourselves in the Standing Orders and in this place does matter. I take great pride in being the first Independent member elected to this place for some time, since Bruce Goodluck.

It is a matter of interest, particularly to schoolchildren who come into this place, when they sit up in the public gallery and observe the conduct of this Chamber, who the different members of this House are and what they are called. I take great pride in being called the Independent member. I thank Mr O'Byrne for his clarification. When it comes to Standing Orders, you are an Independent member for Franklin but otherwise not the Independent member.

I thank again the Leader of the House, who has made these amendments to go back to what the core should be, which is the opportunity for people to contribute in this parliament. I take on board the comments made by the Leader of the Greens and I agree that it is a shame that we were given an ultimatum. In the interests of time, I will restrict my comments to that.

[5.01 p.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE (Franklin) - Mr Speaker, I will be very brief. Thank you very much.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr SPEAKER - On the motion as amended.

[5.02 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, just briefly on the motion, as amended - I do not think I have spoken on the substantive motion. I have spoken on amendments.

Mr SPEAKER - The Leader of the House was on the closing of the motion when he put the amendment and we have put the amendment.

Ms O'CONNOR - And now it is the motion as amended.

Mr SPEAKER - Yes, but the Leader of the House has the call.

Ms O'CONNOR - I think I am okay to speak. I am speaking on the motion as amended.

Mr SPEAKER - The Leader of the House has sat down. He was on his feet closing the substantive debate when he moved that motion so the contributions have now concluded.

Ms O'CONNOR - I thought we now have an amended motion and no-one has spoken on the amended motion.

Mr SPEAKER - No.

Ms O'CONNOR - Okay. I was simply seeking a commitment from Mr Ferguson to be more collaborative about these matters in the future.

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

Ms O'CONNOR - On the question, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER - No.

Ms O'CONNOR - Yes.

Mr SPEAKER - No. I am putting the question.

Ms O'CONNOR - You said, 'The question is that the amended motion be agreed to', so there is a question before the House, which I would like to speak to briefly.

Mr Ferguson - The whole afternoon we have been on the question.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am asserting my rights to speak at the moment.

Mr SPEAKER - The Leader of the House was on the conclusion of the substantive debate on the motion when he moved the amendment. The amendment has been passed. It is now part of the final motion and that motion I am putting -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Mr Speaker. There is a question before the House and I think I am entitled to speak briefly on the question that is before the House. The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Mr SPEAKER - The advice is that the debate has been concluded.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Speaker, no disrespect to you at all. There is a question before the House, which means I can speak.

Mr SPEAKER - I am seeking clarification.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will be very brief.

Mr Ferguson - You do realise we have been on the question already.

Ms O'CONNOR - I am simply seeking a commitment from you to be more collaborative on these sorts of matters in the future. That is all. I do not want to make a speech. I just do not want us to be put in this position again.

Mr SPEAKER - The advice is that the debate has been closed by the Leader of the House. The question now before the House, which I have to put, is that the amended motion be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

LAND TAX RATING AMENDMENT BILL 2022 (No. 6)

Second Reading

Continued from 23 March 2022 (page 50).

[5.06 p.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Minister for Finance) - Mr Speaker, I thank members of the House who have spoken to this bill. We had a pretty spicy discussion when it was last raised. I do not intend to continue that in any great length. I could. There was a huge focus by the shadow treasurer on population. I am raring to go on that but Mr Tucker gave a very good account of himself in responding to that.

State population has grown significantly in the last eight years. As Mr Tucker correctly recited, we beat our target by two years and the state has continued to grow. The pressures we are seeing on our infrastructure and housing points to that. I am surprised that people would want to make an issue of that. The state has grown significantly at 540 000, variously 542 000-546 000 people now calling Tasmania home. We look forward to the next ABS census data. They also do quarterly data which is more circumspect and the reliable data comes out at different time frames.

I was fairly blunt on where Labor got to with this issue of rents. I do not feel the House should have its time taken up any more on that matter. It just really surprises me that people who 10 months ago told Tasmanians that if you reduce land tax, you take downward pressure on rents, have walked away from that. They say that is no longer the case. They are denying it or they have walked away from their policy. I find that really weird. It is still on Labor's website. A person looking at Labor, what they stand for, would read, what I have in my hand but, they are so divided and so hot to pour scorn on others that they went that way. There are questions to answer there.

The question was put to me by Dr Broad, which I have just taken some advice on. I was unsure where the \$42 million number came from. The figure I have been provided with is \$39 million. That is not an expenditure of Government but rather an estimate of foregone revenue. I trust that it is helpful.

I thank everybody for their contributions and am thankful that the House, in large part at least, is supportive of this measure.

As I close, I remind that if we were not doing this, not only would people be paying land tax with the old thresholds and old rates but, because the valuations have gone up so quickly, you would see significant increases in absolute terms on an individual bill. Where it is a building on a piece of ground rented out as a residential rental to a tenant, that would have led to a consequential increase in rent.

It is important that I remind members of our House that this initiative we are voting on we need to do it for no other reason than tax relief. For no other reason you should satisfy yourself it is a legitimate policy, if for no other reason than it will actually put that down-ward pressure on the rents in an environment where valuations are increasing significantly.

We want to get ahead of that and we thank the House for the debate on this bill.

Ms O'Connor - Mr Speaker I wish the House to go into Committee.

Mr SPEAKER - The question is the bill be read for the second time.

The House divided -

AYES 18

Mrs Alexander (Teller)
Ms Archer
Mr Barnett
Dr Broad
Ms Butler
Ms Dow
Mr Ellis
Mr Ferguson
Ms Haddad
Mr Jaensch
Mr O'Byrne
Ms O'Byrne
Ms Ogilvie
Mrs Petrusma
Mr Rockliff
Mr Street
Ms White
Mr Winter

NOES 1

Ms O'Connor (Teller)

Motion agreed to.

Bill read the second time.

LAND TAX RATING AMENDMENT BILL 2022 (No 6)

In Committee

Clause 1 to 2 agreed to.

Clause 3

Principal Act

[5.20 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR - Chair, what I am trying to discern here, I can flag that we have two amendments to clause 4 that raise the threshold. I would like to understand, what mechanism in this legislation he believes will put downward pressure on rents? As the minister is well aware, and as I detailed in my second reading speech, there is no evidence basis to suggest that a cut to land tax will lower rental prices, and because the last time this House enacted a cut to land tax, there was no downward change in rents. In fact, rents only went up and for some households they have gone up by 25 per cent within the space of a year.

I recognise that on average, over the past year, rents have gone up by about 11 per cent but, we have not seen the effect of the previous cut to land tax flowing on in any way to tenants. What we have seen is the converse. While the pressure has been eased on property investors, or people who have a second or third property, there has been no consequent easing of pressure on tenants. We have looked everywhere for evidence, anywhere in the world, that a cut to land tax leads to those savings being passed on to tenants. We cannot find a shred of evidence or a sentence that points to cuts to land tax flowing on to tenants. Indeed, Chair, independent economist, Saul Eslake, has made it really clear that it is false to state a cut to land tax will put downward pressure on rents.

I am hoping that the minister can provide some evidence that this, ultimately \$220 million hit to the state budget will flow on to tenants in any way.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Ms O'Connor, for the question. I will go back over where I had already spoken and addressed this point. In an environment with rising valuations, the Government has not made the argument that this initiative will lead to a consequent reduction in rents. It has not said that at any time. For that matter, nor has the Labor Party. What we have said and the proper language that has been used, is that it will place downward pressure on rent.

I believe that I have already made the case that in an environment with increasing valuations and therefore leading to increasing land tax bills, without this intervention you can guarantee that landlords will be factoring in an increase in their land tax obligations to future rental calculations. That is a component - the Premier has actually made this case as well - that is a component for an input cost for the owner of the residence in seeking to recover their costs and make a return as well. I would like to be very deliberate and careful about making that distinction. On the one hand, we are not saying that a reduction in land tax obligations has led to or would expect to lead to that amount of rent reduction. What we are saying is that without this intervention, you can take it that the valuations leading to increasing land tax obligations would have led to even greater rent increases than we have seen occur. I hope that assists the committee.

Ms O'CONNOR - Thank you, Chair. Just briefly I take on board what you said just then, minister, but it is a much more cautious use of language in relation to any potential connection between this legislation and rental costs in Tasmania. When this was first being spruiked by the Premier, a central theme to justify this was that it would put downward pressure on rents. Then when we asked the Premier about it in question time, he was adamant that this cut to land tax would put downward pressure on rents. It is a central theme of the minister's second reading speech - mentioned twice - and then there is another mention of relieving some of the costs of rental properties.

I regard the language that has been used about this cut to land tax as dishonest. Tasmanian families who are desperate to find a home, who are now spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, are hearing from government that government is going to do something that will put downward pressure on rents, when in fact this will do nothing to reduce the cost of rent. This is another example where I encourage the Government not to smear everything in spin; be honest about this.

The explanation that Mr Ferguson just gave had more credibility about it than his second reading speech. There are a lot of Tasmanian property owners who are being sluggish because the valuation on their property has gone up because there is not enough housing. So, of course, it is hitting people in the back pocket to some extent. I am not talking about the family shack but investors who have bought into the Tasmanian property market who are getting massive increase in values on their property. Property prices have gone up by 30 per cent in the past year.

If we had had that sort of sincerity about what this is about from the Government and the minister early in the piece, I think we would be having a really different conversation now. It is not reasonable to put in the second reading speech a complete falsehood about this having some sort of downward impact on rents, because it is not true.

I raise this as someone wants second reading speeches to be fact rich and absent propaganda, as they have been historically. It actually only started in the last few years. I regard this speech as really dishonest. It should be an example to the Government of how to do better in laying out the argument for a policy direction. The argument that is in here is not the reason for that policy direction being set, and it is not the reason that the Tasmanian Budget will be \$220 million dollars worse off over four years.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4

Schedule 1 amended (Rate of land tax)

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Deputy Speaker, I will move these two amendments together so we can progress through this bill.

I move -

First amendment

Clause 4, paragraph (c):

leave out the paragraph

insert instead the following paragraph (c):

by omitting '\$400 000 or more' from column 2 of item 3 in the table
and substituting '\$500 000 - \$5 999 999.99'

Second amendment

Clause 4, paragraph after (e):

Insert the following paragraph after paragraph (e):

(f) by inserting the following item, after item 3 in the table:

4.	\$6 000 000 or more	\$84 350 and 2.4 cents for each dollar of the assessed land value or apportioned assessed land value in excess of \$6 000 000
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This is a reasonable amendment. It accounts for the fact that if someone has property valued at over \$6 million, they can probably afford to pay a slightly higher level of land tax. We got the figure of \$6 million by looking around the country. For example, in Victoria the maximum threshold is \$3 million; South Australia, \$1.35 million; New South Wales, \$5 million; Queensland, \$10 million; Western Australia, \$11 million. If you average out those maximum thresholds around the country you come in at about \$6 million. The average maximum rate of land tax around the country is 2.4 per cent.

We should be making sure that landowners and property owners who can afford to pay more land tax do so. It would mitigate to some extent the slug to the budget of these cuts to land tax. I would like to hear the minister's answer why this is not reasonable. We are not talking about a huge number of property owners who would have a piece of property that is worth more than \$6 million. Could the minister talk us through his position on this amendment and why we have not set a maximum threshold like this?

Dr BROAD - Labor will not be supporting this amendment, Chair. Ms O'Connor, you are saying 2.4 cents per dollar is in place in other states? I would like know if you have done any modelling of the impact of this. We know that assets over \$6 million might seem a lot of money, but you are interfering in a major asset class. For example, office buildings, supermarkets, large car parks - any building you can imagine is worth more than \$6 million. A lot of buildings in the CBD of Hobart would come into this class. Indeed, CBDs across the state, Burnie, Devonport, even places like Ulverstone, would have some buildings potentially worth more than \$6 million.

We know that buildings and land as an asset class is typically a long investment. Quite often you will have a supermarket where Coles or Woollies do not own the supermarket building. An investor has purchased it and leases it out with an expected rate of return. This bill cuts that rate of return by 2.4 per cent. So, what would be the impact on supermarkets by you absolutely slaughtering the -

Ms O'Connor - Slaughtering?

Dr BROAD - Yes.

Ms O'Connor - I will take you through what the other states do.

Dr BROAD - 2.4 per cent is a massive change. You are absolutely changing the dynamic of an asset class in Tasmania. I am not sure what the average return on assets would be for buildings worth over \$6 million, but because they are typically a long-term investment, I suggest they would not be much over 4 or 5 per cent at the moment. There might be some asset classes that do really well, that return 10-15 per cent but typically, large infrastructure projects are based on a long-term investment with a much lower rate of return. What you have done here is impacting that rate of return without any regard to contracts that have already been signed. I am sure this has not been discussed with any major land owners, or even any land owners with property worth over \$6 million that is not a residence.

I believe this could have a detrimental impact on the economy. It could drive up the price of goods in supermarkets and retail chains, because a lot of those are in large buildings or large shopping centres and you are proposing to reduce their return on assets by at least 2.4 per cent. What happens if there is a bunch of asset classes that are getting a smaller rate of return than 2.4 per cent?

Ms O'Connor - I think your maths is wrong and I will help you with that.

Dr BROAD - 2.4 cents for each dollar is 2.4 per cent.

Ms O'Connor - It's actually 0.9 cents for every dollar over \$6 million.

Dr BROAD - What happens if you have a building like Eastlands, for example. How much is that worth? How much are you slugging them? You have done no modelling. You have done no consultation and this is a significant change.

Ms O'Connor - It is on unimproved land value.

Dr BROAD - This is a significant change to the dynamics of the Tasmanian market, and you would at least expect that such a significant change would have had further discussion rather than being dropped this afternoon. Labor will not be supporting this amendment.

Ms O'Connor - Do you think there was modelling on the original one? I can answer some of those questions put by Dr Broad. I suggest your maths are wrong. It is an increase on each dollar over \$6 million from 1.5 to 2.4 cents of a dollar. Therefore, the increase is only 0.9 cents for each dollar over \$6 million. It is on unimproved land value, so the building is irrelevant. I will take you through the rates in other states and territories. Before I do that, did you ask the minister whether any modelling had been done on the impact on the state Budget of such a cut to land tax revenue, when our own source revenue here is declining?

Dr BROAD - I understand that. The state Budget is \$8 billion and so, \$39 million is quite significant.

Ms O'CONNOR - It is \$220 million over four years. Your maths was out. I had notes on the flyer, so I am not holding it against you.

Victoria's maximum rate is 2.55 per cent for a maximum threshold of \$3 million.

South Australia - 2.4 per cent. Maximum threshold \$1.35 million.

New South Wales - 2 per cent. Maximum threshold a bit over \$5 million.

Queensland - 2.25 per cent. Maximum threshold \$10 million.

Western Australia - 2.67 per cent. Maximum threshold \$11 million.

The average is 2.4 per cent.

As I made clear before, it is on unimproved land value, not that I particularly want to be here to make life easier for global corporations who own supermarkets but that is not the point here. The point is that we do not have a maximum threshold here that acknowledges this is land in Tasmania and the Tasmanian people at some level should have a return from that.

We are not seeking to interfere in a major asset class, and significant maximum thresholds have been set by a number of jurisdictions. I believe this is good policy. I cannot see the minister or the Opposition supporting it but we are in the process here of gouging \$220 million out of the forward Estimates, and in a state where people are leaving in significant numbers - I think because they cannot find a home, and you think because they cannot find a home, Dr Broad - we need to be mindful of the impact of this legislation on the state budget and on the capacity for the Government to build homes that people need. I commend the amendments.

Sitting Times

Mr FERGUSON - Mr Chair, before I respond to Ms O'Connor I wish to extend the sitting to allow us to finish this bill and also to allow Mr Jaensch to deal with his amendment. I move -

That for this day's sitting under Sessional Order 18A that the House not stand adjourned at 6 o'clock and that the House continues to sit past 6 o'clock.

I sense it will not be very long past 6 o'clock.

Ms O'BYRNE - I think you might have missed the time frame. Having said that, I do not think we are going to complain, but there is a normal period of time that is required before such a motion can be made. I imagine that we are comfortable to get through this as quickly as possible tonight, so we will accept it.

However, I note that there is a time frame that is normally associated with this, and it being a Thursday night we also have members who have to travel some distance.

Motion agreed to.

Mr FERGUSON - Thank you, Mr Chair. Thank you, Ms O'Connor, for your amendments and also for the written version of them.

I have not had the opportunity to have any work on that undertaken by our staff of Treasury and Finance. The Government will not be supporting your amendment on this occasion but you have made an argument for that. I am not in a position to be able to quickly even assess what the impact on budget or otherwise would be; what the impact might be in a positive way for the budget and inversely what the negative impact would be on the property sector. Dr Broad has made a good argument about that; quite a sudden policy shift into the major property class.

I also note that land tax, by itself, is just one of the mix of taxes that is applied by our state. Other states also have mixes of taxes. Land tax, by itself, is not a true representation of the total tax that will be paid by, for example, those supermarkets or large office complexes, even if they are in prime areas that are paid by a single tax payer, or a collective, that are then paid into Treasury. For those reasons, I am advised that caution always needs to be exercised before comparing state land tax regimes like for like, at face value, because there is no state in the country where land tax is applied on its own.

We do not support the amendment. Thank you for the discussion but we would not be able to support that.

Ms O'Connor - Can I ask if you will have a look at it for later down the track, minister?

Mr FERGUSON - I am not going to confirm that the Government will look at it but it is on the public record. You might call this a land super tax or something like that. Clearly, you are saying to people that if you own property worth more than \$6 million then you should pay a much greater rate of tax.

I will remind members that the way that land tax is calculated in Tasmania is aggregate value, so it will not necessarily be the case. You might have a unit holder in a corporation that has, say, \$6 million worth of portfolio land and suddenly you think that you might be hitting up the big end of town but you might actually be hitting up families in your electorate who might have a small shareholding in such an asset.

I am not going to commit the Government to looking at it but, Ms O'Connor, you are always able to make your case in future opportunities or a private members' bill. The Government certainly would not see the merit in this, based on what we have seen today.

Amendments negatived.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Title agreed to.

Bill to be reported without amendment.

Bill read the third time.

**EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENTS (EDUCATION REGULATION)
BILL 2021 (No. 53)**

In Committee

Council amendment to clause 146

Mr JAENSCH - Mr Chair, I move -

That the Legislative Council's amendment be agreed to.

Mr Chair, the amendment is clause 146 for a new section 6(4)(a)(i) after subparagraph (B) insert the following subparagraph:

(c) relevant teaching skills and experience as a practising teacher; and

Clause 146 of the bill amends the membership of the Teachers Registration Board (TRB) from a 12-member representative board to a five- to seven-member skills-based board. The bill passed by the House of Assembly on 11 November 2021 established that specific skills relevant to the TRB's functions would be identified through a skills matrix to be developed and maintained by the TRB. The TRB's primary role is to regulate teachers to ensure that the quality of teaching for students and their safety is paramount.

The Legislative Council's amendment legislates that relevant teaching skills and experience as a practising teacher must be part of the TRB's skills-based board, where these or similar skills would otherwise have been included as part of the TRB's skills matrix. The amendment does not materially alter the bill's intent to move the TRB from a representative board to a skills-based board and legislates skills which were always expected to form part of the skills matrix. The Government does not object to the amendment.

Ms O'BYRNE - I, too, am conscious that we want to maintain a reasonable time of leaving tonight but I want to put on record that we support the amendment. We obviously support the amendment because we moved it in the Lower House when the Government did oppose it. I genuinely do not understand why it was opposed in the first place because, as the minister has just said, and in their briefing to us, the minister said the department could not foresee a situation where those skills we identified would not be included on the board. That leaves me with a slightly discontented, concerned view about it but I am pleased to see that the other place has looked at this issue, looked at the amendment. The amendment is slightly different from the one we moved but does ensure that those relevant teaching skills are there.

They are important for a couple of reasons, mainly around confidence in the process but also to be sure that those things that are peculiar to schools, that are known and understood by people who have worked in schools, are properly reflected in the process.

We originally talked about a practising teacher, as I understand the original amendment had, but this one allows for someone who has been a practitioner, so a retired principal, for instance, would be appropriate. They are really important, particularly as we are dealing with some of those significant issues at the moment around workload and the stress that teachers are finding. It is important to have people who are making decisions and advising decisions to the minister about the practical implication of any amendments that may be put forward. We are

very pleased to see this but note that it could have been dealt with in this House. I always think we should send the best legislation possible to the other place so it does not have to come back amended. We should reflect on that in the future.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Deputy Chair, it is a bit of a case of 'we told you so' but thankfully the upper House has seen the need to have people with relevant teaching skills and experience as a practising teacher on the Teachers Registration Board, a skills-based board, the skills that you would want on that board.

Just reflecting on what Ms O'Byrne said, the number of times in the last seven years that legislation has come back from the other place to here containing amendments that were proposed either by the Opposition or by members of the crossbench, it happens on a very regular basis. That points to a fear of losing control on the part of Government in the Assembly, so you do not want to acknowledge that legislation you have brought forward is not the best it could be. You do not want other members in this place to have the vague satisfaction of getting an amendment passed in here.

I encourage ministers who bring legislation into the Assembly, instead of reflexively dismissing any proposed amendment, to have a look at it because the other House is fixing it for us. We are legislators, many of us have long experience in improving legislation and that experience should be drawn on by the House. It goes to some of the matters that we talked about today; that need for mutual respect in here. Respect cuts both ways. It is not something that you can demand. You have to command respect and you do that by treating people with respect.

We strongly support the Legislative Council's amendment because it improves the bill and makes sure that the Teachers Registration Board will continue to have people on it who are educators and who have the education of our children front of mind all the time. Of course, you need people with governance experience but a genuine skills-based board that is going to do the job we need the TRB to do efficiently and fairly, in the best interests of children, should have teachers on it. Full stop. End of story. We support the amendment.

Mr JAENSCH - Mr Chair, I thank members for their contributions. For the record, and not having been a participant in the debate on the original legislation in this place, I am advised that the Legislative Council amendment is different from the one originally proposed in this House, which I will not reflect on. I am advised that the revised wording does not limit recruitment in the way that the original proposed amendment did; that the reference to 'relevant teaching experience' provides that flexibility and that the skills referred to, however, were always accounted for in the proposed skills matrix. That is what I have been able to get by way of -

Ms O'Byrne - It was a long conversation down here, last time.

Mr JAENSCH - Yes. I am sad that I missed out on that, but I will be around for the next one. Thank you very much.

Council amendment agreed to.

Resolution agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr JAENSCH (Braddon - Minister for Education, Children and Youth) - Mr Speaker, I move that the House does now adjourn.

Firefighters - Presumptive Cancer Laws 2021 National Student Safety Survey

[5.58pm]

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) - Mr Speaker, I have two matters to raise today.

First, Tasmania did some phenomenal work in introducing presumptive cancer laws for firefighters, some years ago. That has had a significant impact. We know that our firefighters are some of the most at risk. I have read quite a bit of the final report of the Australian Firefighters' Health Study that was conducted by Monash University, which identified a list of significant cancers that impacted people who fought fires because of their exposure to the toxins.

When the parliament gave the description of the diseases that would be covered, it was very much based on the international work that had been done and the work that had been passed already in Canada, who led the world on this. Since then, we are having far more women participate as career and volunteer firefighters. What we have seen happen in Canada is that, despite the fact that four significant studies have been done, the numbers of women firefighters are still too small to get a broad picture of the cancers they are fighting. They have recognised that with the growth of women's participation in firefighting, we now should be looking at whether we increase the numbers or types of cancers that are covered. In fact, Manitoba and a number of regions in Canada have already done this. They have said that it allows their sisters in the fire service to equal protection as their male counterparts. That is been welcomed by firefighters in Canada and I hope that we can progress it here.

Cancers that should be added are cervical, ovarian, penile, thyroid, pancreatic, skin and lung. There are other cancers that are a greater risk when you are exposed to toxins through the skin. I am glad that the minister is here, because this is a conversation that we should be having -

Mrs Petrusma - I have already raised it with the department.

Ms O'BYRNE - Good; because the worker's compensation bill that is in draft form at the moment does not deal with this. It deals with other things around section 27, but it would be a great opportunity for us to ensure that women firefighters are afforded the level of protection as others.

The other issue I will raise is a little bit sad. The 2021 National Student Safety Survey (NSSS) report was commissioned by universities Australia as part of Respect Now, Always. It is the second initiative to identify the rates of sexual harassment and sexual assault in universities. Whilst that sum of the numbers are a little bit lower, it actually cannot be compared to the 2016 data because the data that has been collected has been collected in a COVID-19 environment and a lot of people removed themselves from universities, studied online or changed their mode of study behaviours.

What is really concerning is that some of the more significant headline figures - and I'll just touch on them, because they surveyed more than 43 000 students from 38 different universities - and what we have found is that things are not progressing as well as we would like them to progress. In the last 12 months, one in 90 students have experienced sexual assault, with only one in 20 of those formally reporting the incident. About 50 per cent of students could not identify that they knew what their university's pathway was to report an assault, or to report harassment or to go and seek assistance. Many of those who did, then did not feel that they were supported appropriately through it.

It is the second initiative, so two in five said that - 43.5 per cent, or two in five said they knew nothing or very little about where to seek support or assistance. One in two, 53.6 per cent knew nothing or very little about formal reporting processes. One in two, 46.7 per cent knew very little about how they would get any kind of assistance whatsoever.

What is really concerning me is that while the data at a headline figure might look like it is getting a little better, it is not, because we are not comparing like-to-like. If all the work that we have done in the time since the 2016 research, which was produced in 2017, is not making it safer for students on our campuses then we fundamentally have a problem that we need to deal with. It is about changing our behaviours in a much broader way because it is not okay to send our students to university and have these kinds of experiences.

The survey data also reflects the gendered nature of the sexual violence. Female students, transgender students and non-binary students were more likely to experience sexual violence than male students. In the past 12 months 1.4 per cent of female students have been sexually assaulted at university compared to 0.06 per cent of male students. I do not think male students should be assaulted either but the gendered outcome is still pretty disturbing.

Students with a disability were also more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment at 13.7 per cent and sexual assault at 2.4 per cent. The most common locations to deal with are clubs, social events at 25.8 per cent of students, student accommodation at 25.3 per cent and private homes were at 18.4 per cent. If we are going to provide an environment where we encourage people to be their best, to have their great futures and do everything they can then they deserve not to be assaulted or raped during that process.

Women and Girls - International Events

[6.03 p.m.]

Ms OGILVIE (Clark - Minister for Women) - Mr Speaker, tonight I wear my hat of minister for Women and I felt that it is appropriate timing just to do a little snapshot around the globe about how women and children are faring. I thought I would do this with some examples of what we know is happening and in particular in Ukraine. Olena Zolenska, wife of Volodymyr Zelenskyy has thanked the women of Europe for responding to her pleas to provide for sick Ukrainian children and she says, 'Our children will never forget what you have done for us'.

She has been working with Mrs Macron and the French have been able to provide medical centres to take in 12 leukaemia child patients along with thousands of refugees, to care for them and to respond to the call by the Ukrainian women for help. Women are also playing a huge and formidable role in the war, but it is true to say and it is very sad to note that 109 children

have been killed in Ukraine, 120 wounded and 4000 babies have been born since the war started. You can only imagine what it is like to have a child in the middle of a war. We have seen some of those images and they have been very devastating indeed.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan thousands of girls were left distraught, standing at school gates across the state, across the nation after a last-minute decision by the Taliban to ban girls over 12 from school. There are some terrible stories of the girls who got ready, went to school, were there, prepared to do high school and go on with their education and who were left locked-out at the gates. Antonio Guterres, the UN Secretary-General said:

The denial of education not only violates the equal rights of women and girls to education, but is obviously a bad thing for society.

The Taliban, of course, insisted the closure was temporary. Let us hope that is indeed the case.

In Britain, a debate has broken out with the online safety bill, which was introduced to Westminster parliament last week. The debate spoke of toxic online environments for women in particular. Never before have we seen a society in which, through social media, a person can reach thousands or millions of people. Social media has been called the new frontier for gendered violence. Girls and young women are demanding social media companies take urgent action to protect them online. Globally, attacks involve abusive and insulting language and have been reported by more than half, actually 59 per cent of girls have reported those sorts of attacks on them. This was followed by deliberate embarrassment: 41 per cent of girls have experienced that online; body shaming and threats of sexual violence with 39 per cent of girls reporting that.

Online violence is very serious. It is not only very distressing for the victim, but it cuts off a woman or a girl's capacity to participate in her democracy, in the conversations about her community and her life that matter and to fully express herself. It is an issue that I have spoken on in this place now over eight years and it is something that I take very seriously.

At the other end of the spectrum, I also think it is worth noting that on the international space station women from many countries across our planet have made a huge contribution. We see women expeditioners regularly taking part in missions.

Closer to home, I note our first defence space commander, Air Vice-Marshal Cath Roberts, who when asked which adversary scared her the most, quipped, 'Well, it is not Darth Vader'. It is good to see a sense of humour still exists in that 'space', pun intended. I am truly proud of Australia's emerging capacity in commercial and defence space capability.

In Tasmania we are doing incredibly well, building our own space industry, a lot of it built around the work of our UTAS astrophysicists, leveraging our radio telescope array. A good proportion of those researchers who have built our capacity are women.

On the most difficult note of all, I, too, want to just put on the record my great distress and hope that the young girl missing, Shayla Phillips, will be found safe and well.

Leader of Greens - Apology

[6.08 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Mr Speaker, in the spirit of reconciliation I rise tonight to make a sincere and unreserved apology to anyone who has felt offended or intimidated by my expressions of unease over not wearing masks. I hope that the people who felt upset at my frank expressions of disappointment understand that it comes from a place of great stress. It is not just stress for me, it is stress for everyone in this building.

Those of us who are wearing masks all the time, we just do not want to catch COVID-19. In some ways what we want to do is buy enough time without catching COVID-19 for the medical treatments to catch up. There is so much about this illness that we do not understand. It has only been around for a couple of years but there is enough that we do understand: that we should all be worried and we should all be doing everything we can to avoid catching it.

My frustration, Mr Speaker, which I expressed in here the other night, when a member of your staff was in the Chamber unmasked, which I have expressed outside this Chamber - and I am not afraid to admit it - comes from fear: fear of being infected, fear of brain shrinkage caused by COVID-19, fear of heart enlargement, fear of it getting into every organ in my body, fear of infecting my brother, fear of infecting my staff, fear of infecting my colleagues.

I remind people in this building who are not wearing masks that even being triple vaccinated will not prevent infection. It will not prevent reinfection. Even if the variant that you are infected by - if you have been - was the Omicron BA.1, the evidence points to that not delivering immunity against infection from BA.2. Being triple vaccinated, while it might make us feel a bit safer, is not going to necessarily stop us from being infected or reinfected or infecting others or enduring long COVID-19 or infecting others so that they suffer from long COVID-19.

This is a genuine apology. Mr Jaensch said something earlier to me and it made me think, okay, my behaviour has not been perfect but it comes from a place of knowledge of this virus, and the deepest concern for the Tasmanian people and the people I work with. I implore other people in this building to wear masks.

In our office, for example, one of our staff does not have a spleen because of a childhood accident. If he gets infected, he is in big trouble. There are many people like that in the building. There are a lot of older workers in Hansard and all through the building. There are people who have chronic conditions, who are immunocompromised. Then there are those of us who do not want to catch this virus because we have read enough to be really concerned about what it can do to the human brain, the heart and the body.

So, to Mr Boutchard, I am sorry. To other Liberal staff members whom I have had a crack at on the way past, I am sorry. That came from not feeling safe around unmasked people.

I will end with a plea to everyone in this building to think about the other people in this building. I think you should wear your mask when you are in other indoor spaces that are not your home. Remember, Dr Veitch strongly recommended that we continue to wear masks. Even if you do not wear a mask outside this building, I ask that you do inside this space, because it is a large workplace. There are people here from all demographics, on the full spectrum of good health to average health, so let us look after each other.

In this building, at the very least, given how many people are in here and what close quarters we are in, let us just keep our masks on; it is not a big ask. They are uncomfortable, sure. They are annoying, yes but, they do provide some protection against infection from a virus we are just beginning to understand, and which is mutating faster than we can develop vaccines to combat it. I will leave it at that.

Mr Speaker, I am genuinely sorry. I also genuinely want to see people in this building wear their masks in this building.

Sustainable Timber Tasmania - Protest

[6.14 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Minister for Primary Industries and Water) - Mr Speaker, tonight on behalf of the Government, I condemn today's workplace invasion of Sustainable Timber Tasmania offices in Hobart by the Bob Brown Foundation protesters.

All workers, wherever they are across the state of Tasmania, deserve to be able to go to work and complete their jobs in peace and safety. That is why our Government has tried, and will continue in its efforts to prosecute our workplace protection legislation. I will read a statement by the Chief Executive Officer of Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Steve Whiteley, about this workplace invasion. He says:

Today, the Bob Brown Foundation attempted to bully and intimidate STT staff in their workplace. This behaviour was undertaken with the clear objective to cause distress and harmful impact to staff and others. Bullying and intimidation is never okay.

I visited at lunchtime to show support to Sustainable Timber Tasmania and their employees. They were concerned and distressed; many of them had to go home as a result of the distress, as a result of the bullying and intimidation by these radical protesters.

Mr Ellis - Shame.

Mr BARNETT - It is a shame. It is shameful, and we have had a gutful of the workplace invasions. They have had a gutful of workers not being entitled to work, free from intimidation, bullying and harassment.

We have attempted to pass legislation through this parliament several times, and we will do so. We will not give up. It is not about stopping Tasmanians from protesting. Let us be very clear, it respects the right of every Tasmanian to express their view and to protest lawfully. There are no issues there. The legislation that we are focused on, and will introduce, will not stop legal protests outside hospitals, or schools or climate change protests in the streets or on footpaths. It is not an issue. We are talking about protecting workers and their right to work, and businesses and their right to operate.

Today we have seen it. Full frontal. I was up there and I can tell you, even I am affected as a result of being in that workplace and seeing what has occurred. It is not on. The employees at Sustainable Timber Tasmania, and potentially others, have been affected by this workplace invasion. This week, we have the Leader of the Greens consistently talking about the

importance of safety in the workplace. A few moments ago, she gave a speech about the importance of protecting vulnerable Tasmanians. Well, come on.

I call on the Tasmanian Greens to condemn this workplace invasion. The Leader of the Greens, Cassy O'Connor, and the Tasmanian Greens - I am calling on you to condemn this workplace invasion of just a few hours ago, where there was bullying, harassment and intimidation. According to the CEO, it caused much distress and harmful impact to the staff of Sustainable Timber Tasmania. It is not on. What about those workers? Where is the Leader of the Greens condemning the Bob Brown Foundation and those radical protesters today? What is their position? I want to know the view of the Leader of the Greens with respect to Tasmania's workplace invasion. They have been saying all week that they want to protect vulnerable Tasmanians and they deserve safety in the workplace. We have been talking about it during the week. Well, this is shameless interference. I am very concerned.

I want to be very clear that this Government will not give up with respect to our workplace protection legislation. We will not give up on fighting for Tasmanians' right to work peacefully and in safety, free from radical protesters or anybody else who is intimidating them in their workplace. Be assured that this Government is resolute in our efforts and the Labor Party will have an opportunity again. They have opposed it for nearly eight years, since 2014. They will have an opportunity to support this legislation and pass it through the parliament. Tasmanians have had a gutful. It is not on.

Amos Family - Bicentenary

[6.21 p.m.]

Ms BUTLER (Lyons) - Mr Speaker, last night on the Adjournment Debate I rose to advise the House of the bicentenary of the Amos family I attended at Cranbrook on Saturday 19 March 2022. I would like to add to that Adjournment from last night. I have names of the committee who formed that fantastic celebration on Saturday and I would like to name them personally tonight on the Adjournment.

Alison Nation did a fantastic job, secretary and treasurer; and Jeff Tongs; Rod Amos from Colac; Rachel Amos-Ritchie; Adam Greenhill, who apparently was the hero of the event; his parents Bob and Pat Greenhill; Adam at Gala; Bob and Pat at Glen Gala; Jenny and David Amos from Cranbrook; and Jane Amos from Queensland.

The House adjourned at 6.22 p.m.

APPENDIX 1

RESPONSE TO PETITION

Petition No. 15 of 2021 House of Assembly

The petitioners ask the House to:

To the Speaker and Members House of Assembly, in Parliament assembled

We, the undersigned residents and rate payers in the Glamorgan-Spring Bay

Municipality, Tasmania, draws to the attention of the House the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Municipality rate rise to the 2021/2022 financial year, which occurred without sufficient community consultation.

The Petitioners request that the House to call on the Government to:

1. Institute a board of inquiry into the financial and administrative affairs of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council;
2. That such a board be required to produce definitive recommendations as to the rectification of such issues as are identified by the inquiry, and;
3. That such an inquiry be ordered to conclude its inquiry within five months of its inception
4. And that each month the Board reports its progress to The Parliament of Tasmania and recommends action it deems appropriate to the situation.

GOVERNMENT POSITION:

RESPONSE:

- The Government is aware that the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council adopted a change to methodology for calculating residential rates from an Average Area Rate to the Assessed Annual Value methodology in June 2021.

- The Tasmanian Government acknowledges the concerns raised by community members, however as the Minister for Local Government and Planning I am not satisfied that this operational matter of council justifies the establishment of a Board of Inquiry as required by Section 215(1)(b) of the Act.
- The former Minister has spoken with the Mayor of the Council and the Director of Local Government has met with the General Manager and the Council's leadership team. The former Minister for Local Government and Planning also met with concerned residents.
- Local government is, however, an independent sphere of government and councils are accountable to their residents and ratepayers for the decisions they make.
- In February 2020, the then Director of Local Government conducted an audit of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council's plans, strategies and policies, including those required under the *Local Government Act 1993*. A significant number of deficiencies were identified.
- In July 2020 a Performance Improvement Direction (PID) was issued by the former Minister for Local Government and Planning in accordance with Part 12B of the *Local Government Act 1993*. The PID required the Council to correct deficiencies with its strategic documents within a specified timeframe.
- The strategic documents provide the Council with a strong understanding of its current budget position as well as the impact current policy settings may have on its financial sustainability and capacity to provide services to the community.
- The Council has advised that all actions required by the PID have been completed.
- To promote community confidence in the Council, the Director of Local Government has instructed the Council to provide ongoing six-monthly reports to the Director and me as Minister on the implementation of their strategic, asset and financial management plans, including how these plans are informing decisions by the Council.
- The reports are also to include advice on strategies and actions to promote community confidence in Council, including consultation.
- These reports are to be made publicly available.



Michael Ferguson MP
Minister for Local Government and Planning

Date: 9/3/22

APPENDIX 2

RESPONSE TO PETITION

Petition No. 16 of 2021 House of Assembly

The petitioners ask the House to:

The petition of the undersigned residents and ratepayers of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Municipality, Tasmania are profoundly disappointed by the Council of Glamorgan-Spring Bay and the lack of transparency, and community consultation, in its activities particularly in regards to the mechanisms employed in the introduction of the rating system for 2021/22. .

Your petitioners, therefore, request the House to call on the Government to establish a Board of Inquiry pursuant to the *Local Government Act 1993* to investigate the financial and administrative affairs of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council and that such Board of inquiry:

1. Be required to produce definitive recommendations as to the rectification of such issues as are identified by the inquiry;
2. Conclude its inquiry within four months of its establishment;
3. Report to the Minister for Local Government each month on its progress and recommending appropriate action as deemed appropriate; and
4. The such monthly reports be tabled in the Parliament of Tasmania.

GOVERNMENT POSITION:

RESPONSE:

- The Government is aware that the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council adopted a change to methodology for calculating residential rates from an Average Area Rate to the Assessed Annual Value methodology in June 2021.
- The Tasmanian Government acknowledges the concerns raised by community members, however as the Minister for Local Government and Planning I am not satisfied that this operational matter of council justifies the establishment of a Board of Inquiry as required by Section 215(1)(b) of the Act.

21/83707/3

- The former Minister has spoken with the Mayor of the Council and the Director of Local Government has met with the General Manager and the Council's leadership team. The former Minister for Local Government and Planning also met with concerned residents.
- Local government is, however, an independent sphere of government and councils are accountable to their residents and ratepayers for the decisions they make.
- In February 2020, the then Director of Local Government conducted an audit of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council's plans, strategies and policies, including those required under the *Local Government Act 1993*. A significant number of deficiencies were identified.
- In July 2020 a Performance Improvement Direction (PID) was issued by the former Minister for Local Government and Planning in accordance with Part 12B of the *Local Government Act 1993*. The PID required the Council to correct deficiencies with its strategic documents within a specified timeframe.
- The strategic documents provide the Council with a strong understanding of its current budget position as well as the impact current policy settings may have on its financial sustainability and capacity to provide services to the community.
- The Council has advised that all actions required by the PID have been completed.
- To promote community confidence in the Council, the Director of Local Government has instructed the Council to provide ongoing six-monthly reports to the Director and myself on the implementation of their strategic, asset and financial management plans, including how these plans are informing decisions by the Council.
- The reports are also to include advice on strategies and actions to promote community confidence in Council, including consultation.
- These reports are to be made publicly available.



Michael Ferguson MP
Minister for Local Government and Planning

Date: 9/3/22

APPENDIX 3

RESPONSE TO PETITION

Petition No. 17 of 2021 House of Assembly

The petitioners ask the House to:

The petition of the undersigned residents and ratepayers of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Municipality, Tasmania express their discontent with the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council following its recent change in Municipal Rating Methodology from Average Area Rates (AAR) to Assessed Annual Value Rates (AAV) Rates.

It is noted that the Council implemented a massive change to the rating system, during an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with no meaningful community consultation and with a high degree of stealth and secrecy.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the House to call on the Minister for Local Government to:

1. Convene a public forum between the Council and ratepayers so that the Council can explain its recent lack of governance and the implementation of the AAV rating methodology for 2021/2022 as opposed to the previous AAR method used since 2012;
2. Require the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council to attend the meeting and freely communicate all relevant information requested;
3. Require the Council to rescind the 2021/2022 Rates and revert to the previous AAR methodology;
4. Stand down the Council until a new election is held, if the Council refuses to rescind the 2021/22 Rates and revert to the previous AAR methodology; and
5. Re-instate the 4 wards to the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Municipality and place a cap of 2 Councillors per ward to ensure equal representation across the Municipality.

21/83745/3

GOVERNMENT POSITION:

RESPONSE:

- The Tasmanian Government is aware that the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council (the Council) adopted a change to methodology for calculating residential rates from an Average Area Rate to the Assessed Annual Value methodology in June 2021.
- The Tasmanian Government acknowledges the concerns raised by community members, including that there was limited consultation with the community before the decision was made.
- The Tasmanian Government understands that through the Council's strategic planning process, it was identified that the previous rating strategy was financially unsustainable. The decision of the Council was to change the method upon which rates are calculated and increase rates significantly in 2021-22.
- As Minister for Local Government and Planning, I do not have the authority to require the Council to attend a meeting; to direct the Council to make any changes to its rating; or to stand down the Council on the basis of its refusal to amend its approach to rating.
- The former Minister for Local Government and Planning and the former Director of Local Government have, however, been worked closely with the Council to improve their performance.
- The former Minister spoke with the Mayor of the Council and met with concerned residents. The former Director of Local Government also met with the General Manager and the Council's leadership team.
- In February 2020, the then Director of Local Government conducted an audit of the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Council's plans, strategies and policies, including those required under the *Local Government Act 1993*. A significant number of deficiencies were identified.
- In July 2020 a Performance Improvement Direction (PID) was issued by the former Minister for Local Government and Planning in accordance with Part 12B of the *Local Government Act 1993*. The PID required the Council to correct deficiencies with its strategic documents within a specified timeframe.
- The strategic documents provide the Council with a strong understanding of its current budget position as well as the impact current policy settings may have on its financial sustainability and capacity to provide services to the community.
- The Council has advised that all actions required by the PID have been completed.

- To promote community confidence in the Council, the then Director of Local Government instructed the Council to provide ongoing six-monthly reports to the Director and me as Minister on the implementation of their strategic, asset and financial management plans, including how these plans are informing decisions by the Council.
- The reports are also to include advice on strategies and actions to promote community confidence in Council, including consultation.
- As with other parts of the petition, I have no authority to re-instate wards in the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Municipality other than in response to recommendations from a review undertaken by the Local Government Board.
- The current Future of Local Government Review being progressed by the Local Government Board is the appropriate place to consider the merits of re-introducing wards within the Glamorgan-Spring Bay Municipality. I encourage all members of the community, including the signatories to this petition, to engage with this Review.



Michael Ferguson MP
Minister for Local Government and Planning

Date: 9/3/2022