



**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF DEBATES**

**Thursday 24 March 2022**

**REVISED EDITION**



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**Thursday 24 March 2022**

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m. acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

**STADIUMS TASMANIA BILL 2021 (No. 48)**

**TREASURY MISCELLANEOUS (AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND  
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT) BILL 2022 (No. 7)**

**Third Reading**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the bills be read for the third time.

**Bills read the third time.**

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

**Consideration of Amendment made in the  
Committee of the Whole Council**

**Continued from 23 March 2022 (page 68).**

[11.09 a.m.]

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the bill as amended in Committee be now taken into consideration.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the amendment be read for the first time.

**Amendment read the first time.**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the amendment be read for the second time.

**Amendment read the second time.**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the amendment be agreed to.

**Amendment agreed to.**

**Bill as amended agreed to.**

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

### **Third Reading**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That the bill be read for the third time.

**Bill read the third time.**

### **MOTION**

#### **Note - Premier's Address**

**Continued from 10 March 2022 (page 50).**

[11.11 a.m.]

**Mr VALENTINE** (Hobart) - Mr President, it has only been a week and a bit this time, as opposed to a few months time. I rise to finish my contribution. I realise I have already taken some time, but there are some matters I would still like to share with the Chamber. Another three hours should do it.

I finished providing an offering on the Burnie Court Complex the last time I was dealing with the state of the state Address. I note that in the Premier's Address, he says:

We recognise there are a wide range of views within the community in relation to the redevelopment of the Burnie Court Complex. However, what has become very evident is that there is an important need to revitalise the Burnie CBD regardless of where the court is situated. Given these concerns, we will engage further with Burnie City Council and the north-west business community to understand the economic and social implications of the current CBD concerns, and, importantly, how best to ensure its revitalisation and how Burnie can best come to life.

I made a note last time I talked on this Address that as Chair of the committee, I made a dissenting report to the committee's report. I gave the reason that I believe public value could not be demonstrated, or was not demonstrated enough. I know we have differences of opinion

on that committee, but it is a very democratic committee. Its five members all vote in different ways, and the majority of the committee passed it. A couple of us had a dissenting report.

It was interesting to note that yesterday the Government told us they are not proceeding with it. While the Government gives approval for various matters that come through the Public Works Committee, they are not bound to follow it. They are not bound to go ahead with development. They need to get approval for development to proceed, according to the Public Works Committee Act. That is the Government's choice. Personally I think it is a sensible move. They have not informed the committee that they want to do that. As to whether they should, I suppose they do not write to tell us when they are going ahead with something we approved. If we disapprove it is possible for them to take it to parliament and seek approval with an act to overturn the committee's decision. I do not recall that having been done in the past. I do not know whether the honourable member for McIntyre recalls that.

**Ms Rattray** - Through you, Mr President, I do not recall that happening. There have been various times where the committee has been rejected, but I have not seen where they have brought a bill in to proceed.

**Mr VALENTINE** - To override, yes. The committee goes right into these developments, and really does scrutinise all aspects of the development. As I said yesterday, another offering, we look at things like consultation. Quite often there might be property owners who are having their land compulsorily acquired. Is that happening in a fair and reasonable manner? Are they getting due attention to the matters that affect them? Farmers having their farms split by a road, do they have proper access from one side of their property to the other? We often have those sorts of matters come before us.

It is a valuable committee in that regard. It is basically sitting, shall we say, instead of parliament. We are representing parliament when we are there. We take our job seriously.

**Ms Rattray** - Through you, Mr President, it is hours and hours of travel as well to actually go on site and look at what has been presented. We do take it very seriously. I know that would have been the case for any other former member of that committee in the past as well.

**Mr VALENTINE** - So when things fly under the radar sometimes we do get a little concerned, I think. I have a question that I am currently seeking an answer to with respect to the Midway Point works. We are able to bring questions to this Chamber. I digress a little, scratching our backs, the Public Works Committee, but I am informing the Chamber as to the valuable work that it does. I think it is valuable. It does not always work out the way we want. We do not always, as individual members, get what we want, or what we believe should happen.

The way I see this Burnie Court one, the Government was really going to be creating a problem, then attempting to fix it by saying they are going to give greater attention to the Burnie CBD. That was interesting because the court received something like 55 000 visitors a year. It is a lot of people to be putting up into the suburbs. There were some concerns and issues there, that is from my perspective. Nevertheless, the Premier says that he is going to be meeting with the mayor and look at ways of being able to improve the CBD. I guess that at least has to be afforded. Hopefully there will be some good outcomes there.

The Premier then deals with multidisciplinary centres that will ensure victims/survivors of both family and sexual violence receive immediate and integrated support in a safe place from a range of services, including family and sexual support, counselling, psychologists, witness intermediaries, police and other related services. If that service is operated correctly, it is so needed. But of course it really is all in the detail as to how that service is provided. Families, members of families, who are involved, who are the subject of abuse, need to be dealt with very carefully. They need to be given security so that they can get on with their lives and not be subjected to the bullying and harassment that quite often is the case.

I wholeheartedly support the development of these centres. It is hard to imagine the stress and sometimes the terror that some experience at the hands of a brutal partner. Hopefully these centres will deliver for those who need those sorts of interventions. If it is managed effectively it could be very good. I think, not just one in the north, one in the south. They need to be strategically placed where they are needed. I encourage the Government, to make sure that where they are placed they will be effective in how they are run.

I asked a question about the Safe Families Coordination Unit. Maybe the Leader can tell me whether the Safe Families Coordination Unit is going to include sexual offending more broadly, including child sexual violence. Which department is that going to sit in? Is this all part of education and family safety? I am assuming it might be, but I am seeking some clarification.

The Premier talks about investing to diversify our forestry industry for a climate-positive future, supporting our mining and mineral sector, advanced manufacturing and defence. There can be very vexed questions around the forestry industry. I know that this Chamber approved the Tasmanian Forest Agreement back in 2013. I thought that we got to a position where the majority of the parties - I will say the majority because there were some that did not support it - got to a position where we could see a future, largely plantation-based, where native forest was no longer going to be such a vexed question. Quite clearly, it is still today. There are still concerns and issues around native forest logging, carbon storage and greenhouse gas emissions, and all the rest of it. Various sides of a debate there.

One thing I think that escapes people's attention often is the habitat loss, and biodiversity in that sense. I do not think that when decisions are made with regard to native forest logging that there is enough consideration given to habitat loss. It is all emotive stuff such as homes for masked owls and swift parrots, and all of those sorts of things. If we could only manage our forests in a way that maximised the plantation side of things, and minimised the native forest logging, and brought the community together, it could benefit the whole state.

Our tourism ventures do not want to see the conflicts. They want to introduce their visitors to the Tasmanian landscape and not have these conflicts being so openly fought in the media. Tension exists continually among those who are engaged in the forestry industry, those who are engaged in tourism and those who feel that it is all impacting on their business. You only have to look at Derby to see some of the conflict. The way mountain biking has taken off there is massive.

There are downsides. I am sure the member for McIntyre will back me up on this. There are people who live in Derby and have done for many years who are not able to reinvest in the community because they simply cannot afford it. As they pass on, their families are going to



sell up and that brings in more and more new money and the nature of the town changes. There are all sorts of things that happen as a result of tension.

In a lot of ways, it is a good thing but it is a bad thing in others, a bad thing when it comes to the building of community.

**Ms Rattray** - That is exactly right. There is certainly a loss of that community feel because most of the homes now are on the short stay market. People do not live in them, and they do not stay long.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Well, it becomes a transient population, does it not? What was once a country town that was very coherent and together, if I can put it that way, with their characters walking the street, having a coffee, that goes a bit, and you lose that.

**Ms Rattray** - A chinwag at the butcher's with Bill Thorne or at the post office, or at the local shop. That is what is gone now.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Yes, that goes and I suppose people say that is progress. I suppose, in a way, it is. Certainly, the attention that has been paid to Derby is providing dividends to the state, in terms of gross domestic product. I do not think there is any question on that. And mountain biking in any sense, if you go to Maydena and have a look at the number of people that are out there in your electorate, Mr President. That has exploded. It is very interesting to see that happen. And, of course, now in Queenstown, no doubt.

I am sure that as the result of the mountain biking that is happening the ambulance services are getting a workout. There is also a downside in that regard, but we need to balance all of that and make sure that we are not killing the goose that lays the golden egg. That is my point on all of that.

The Premier talks about the \$370 million on the South East Irrigation Scheme. Irrigation has brought to life much land around the state that was previously not productive because of the lack of water. I do not think that anyone would deny that irrigation has been largely a big positive for the state. The issue, though, is the fact that whenever you get cropping, you get nutrients being put into the soil. You get issues of salinity, probably coming up through the soil profile; you get nutrient run-off, which means that that goes to the streams, which means that those streams become full of nitrogen and then, you end up with algal growth and all sorts of things as a result of that.

So, it is not to say that you cannot irrigate, it is how you do it that is important, being able to monitor that, and work to minimise the nutrient outflow. It all sounds more complex, and people say, 'do not get in the way, this is good state product', but you do not want to end up with rivers that are not what people want to come and see - clean water. We need to be able to balance that and make sure that we do it to benefit the whole state, including the tourism industry.

It talks about 2000 local jobs. It is a great job employment creator, I do not think anyone would deny that. And who does not need employment? There are \$300 million on the Southern Midlands Irrigation scheme. I know some farms that may be taking advantage of that there. Again, an area that has relatively low rainfall compared to a lot of places. It can increase productivity. Again, poppies and those sorts of things that you would think that previously in

the Southern Midlands may not have been something that was high on the agenda, but now it can be because of the irrigation scheme. There have to be some positives there. But, again, how we do it is the important thing.

**Ms Rattray** - Liquid gold.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Well, yes. There is some of that.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - It is still undervalued in my opinion, water. It is far more valuable than gold, I think. That is just my opinion.

**Mr VALENTINE** - You cannot eat gold, Mr Premier, oh, Mr President. A Freudian slip.

**Mr Willie** - You promoted him.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Maybe that is your next calling, you heard it here first. Mr President, I should say, as I am reading from the Premier's Address. I got my tongue tied up.

Wild deer is an issue. The Premier says in Tasmania we have the greatest opportunity for the paddock-to-plate experiences which are sought after by locals and visitors alike. This includes wild deer. My concern is understanding the sheer damage that these feral pests can cause. Some might say managing for profit and product may see farmers and the wilderness suffer significantly. There are farmers who really are impacted by this. That is a wicked problem. It is a somewhat unusual confluence of interests. You have some of those more highland areas, but not so much highland areas now - apparently there was one seen on the Southern Outlet.

I travelled from below Poatina - I do not know what you would call that escarpment near Carrick there - I travelled from there right up through Poatina the other day and coming across the top, ready to go toward Bothwell, and a deer came out on the road. A fawn, it was a young deer. You would not want to hit one. What damage are they doing? You have to look carefully at that. They are a feral pest, yet there are those who like to shoot them. There is that debate about farming deer and wild deer being able to be sold for product into our butcher shops. These are some of the issues that this particular game is providing for the state. We cannot ignore the damage to farms and wild areas. Some say it is short-sighted and would build an industry but with such risks it needs scrutiny.

With regard to renewable energy projects, the Premier says our plan is backed by our 200 per cent Tasmanian renewable energy target and our Tasmanian Renewable Hydrogen Action Plan. He says we are witnessing unprecedented levels of interest in new renewable energy projects in the state from multiple proponents. Given those projects would be the principal users of Marinus Link, should they not be paying for it? I do not know quite how that works out. That is the reason I raise the question of whether they should be paying for it. Obviously they need Marinus Link to be able to sell their product across to Victoria. One hopes that if Marinus Link goes ahead - and I suggest there needs to be a very good business case to see if that is to happen - what percentage of the usage across that cable is going to be sheeted back to the private producers? Or will it be the state that ends up wearing the cost of that?

Personally, I wonder about the wisdom of private enterprise power generation. What promises have been given in that regard? I question the development of private enterprise power generation because there is always that profit margin that has to be taken into account. There is an increasing demand within the state because of the need for things like developing hydrogen and electric vehicles being increasingly on the radar of families. That is going to cause a significant demand through the network. Why would we not be investing in renewable energy more as a state rather than having private enterprise do that? We can have more control of our future. I want to see the business case and I do not think it is a given, I really do not. I am concerned about Marinus Link in that regard.

**Ms Rattray** - It is not yet funded.

**Mr VALENTINE** - No, it is not. It has been talked up as if it is a fait accompli. I do not think we ought to be doing that at this point.

The Premier goes on to say Tasmania is on track to be a global leader in green hydrogen production by 2030 and we are expecting a decision shortly on our Commonwealth funding application to establish a green hydrogen hub at Bell Bay. Green hydrogen would seem to be an eminently suitable thing to be developing. Obviously, as it is a more transportable product it is a more convenient product for hydrogen cars and hydrogen trucks.

With electric trucks instead of diesel trucks, the size of the battery required would be enormous and not safe. You cannot do it. I am sure they are available. You would think hydrogen would be far more suitable. In its compressed form it would take up less space, less weight, all those things. Using the hydrogen in the vehicles actually produces electricity that then runs the truck. I do not know the technology enough to be able to comment too much.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - I imagine it would work very well on rail.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Yes, it could do and you could catch the train to work, Mr President, the rail line goes not far from your place.

**Mr PRESIDENT** - It would be very convenient.

**Ms Rattray** - I am not sure what your driver might think about that, Mr President, I know he enjoys his role.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Having our state's resources put into that, and there are other areas in Australia actually considering hydrogen generation. You think of the transport issues with hydrogen. There are transport costs - therefore is it competitive? - and all those sorts of things need to be considered. It is interesting the Commonwealth is looking at giving us a grant to actually invest in the hydrogen area. My question is, why are they considering Tasmania for a grant when we are such a long way from the market? Victoria is just across the ditch, but one would expect the amount of hydrogen is going to be produced and used in far more distant locations. It would be interesting to see the business case on that.

There is a link drawn between, he says:

We have always said our plans for Bell Bay as a green hydrogen hub is bolstered by the proposed Marinus Link interconnector and Hydro Tasmania's Battery of the Nation project.

Why is Marinus a factor for green hydrogen? I do not quite understand that. Is there expected to be a demand for mainland power over that link to service the hydrogen plant while we have so much renewable energy to be generated on island? I do not know whether the Leader can give me the answer to know what the thinking is about that.

What else troubles me about Marinus Link is we are promoting Marinus Link so heavily when each state is weekly commissioning more and more renewable energy projects. What if the tap turns off for whatever reason? It might be the mainland no longer needs our energy. Who pays for Marinus Link when it is sitting dormant?

We are providing base load today which is really important. A lot of people who think renewable energy is okay, do not stop to think if you do not have base load there is no power security. Tasmania has to its advantage the power security of having base load power, but with such a lot of renewable energy projects happening on the mainland - it can happen in a network, and is very switchable - is that going to reduce the demand for Tasmanian power generation offerings?

And the cost. I do not know how far it is to Victoria, 400 kilometres or something like that. Someone might correct me if I am wrong. It is a significant distance. It costs money to transport power and there are voltage losses as you go distances. That is why you have transformers to bring it back up to a level needed. The end user points in some cases. I am not an electrical engineer, but I do know that you get power losses, and so, with the power you are producing, not all of it gets to the end point as you lose by transporting power over distances.

Who is paying for that cost? Is it the end user or is it the funder of the Marinus Link? I bet it comes back to the end user at the end of the day. If it does come back to the end user, they are going to see our power is going to be more expensive because the costs - if Marinus Link is privately owned, the owners are going to want to recoup the cost of owning that and the profit margin that goes with this. They are going to want to recoup all that and it is going to be more expensive power if it is transported. I want to see some of that addressed in a business case and factor in the projects happening across other states.

People talk about solar power, batteries and all that sort of thing. What our state produces is base load power. Batteries are a really small fraction of what is needed in a lot of cases. They might provide power for 90 minutes or something, where it is providing base load power almost ad infinitum. That relies on what is falling out of the sky and we know that is not always reliable. We have to manage to make sure we can deliver base load power over a significant period of time.

While renewables are not always the answer, when they are in a network, they might be. That technology and software to manage this is improving day by day. I would not want to be part of those who control the energy market and have to reset prices every 30 seconds as it is unbelievable the way it all happens. I do not know whether anyone else has gone into how they do it, but it is a phenomenal area to see the complexity of how power is bought and sold.

I move down where Premier says:

Hand in hand with the opportunities for new renewable energy generation, Tasmania can lead the way in the deployment of new technologies to meet our target of net zero emissions by 2030.

I have said it here before, but what is this statement? I simply cannot understand the logic. Net zero emissions by 2030 and yet we are supposed to have met it already. I do not understand that as it is not logical. According to the Government we are at net zero now. I do not think I am misquoting. Why do we have a target to meet net zero by 2030? It does not seem right.

The Premier talks about the Government investing \$10 billion over four years to replace our ageing fleet of fossil fuel boilers in schools, hospitals and correctional facilities with renewable energy power alternatives, including bioenergy technology. Well done for doing that. I do not think that anyone could argue that the Government has not done the right thing by replacing fossil fuel boilers in schools, hospitals and correctional facilities. That is a big step in the right direction. That helps to reduce our emissions.

Bioenergy technology is an interesting one. I know it is convenient for those in forestry to be able to get some sort of return on the by-products of the manufacturing of timber by getting rid of their waste that way. It would be interesting to see how that is supposed to improve our emissions. I am not sure how much research has been undertaken into bioenergy in regards to greenhouse gas production. It would be interesting to see.

Obviously, the Climate Change (State Action) Amendment Bill 2021 is the most important one. It is coming before us in the not too distant future, but it will need significant attention. I will leave the debate on that until then. I think we are past the point where we have climate change deniers in parliament. Quite clearly the climate change is a thing. Look at what is happening in Queensland with the floods and the like. There might be some who still shake their heads and say, 'No, that is just a natural cycle'.

By head of population we have the highest percentage of scientific researchers in the city of Hobart than any other city in Australia. We have them at our back door, at IMAS. They are telling us this is real stuff. You hear about bottom water in the Antarctic coming up and melting the underneath of the icefloes; not the sun burning down on top. Some will say that will give us a few centimetres rise in sea level. If it ends up melting the stuff from underneath, it is going to increase the flow of glaciers into the ocean, and anything that comes off the land into the sea is going to lift it even more. There are people saying that it could be metres and metres of sea level rise.

Think of little Hobart, as you come along Davey Street. Some of the king tides are just up under the road. Imagine a couple of metres on top of that. You say, 'That is going to be a hundred years away'. If we do not attend to it today, it is not going to fix it for a hundred years time. We have to be realistic. Whatever we do, we have to have climate change in mind. So, that bill will be a very important bill. We have to make sure that whatever we put into it is effective, and that it will really help us.

What difference can little old Tasmania make? A small amount of the emissions of the whole globe. It is not what it is about. It is about leadership. It is about showing a way and then others will follow. I am not saying it is like sheep, but if you get one sheep running off down the track, you will see another whole flock of them going off down the track. People

follow good leadership and we need to grasp the nettle. That old saying is showing my age. I do not know whether people realise, but stinging nettles sting you if you touch them lightly. If you grasp them, they do not. Grasp the nettle. That is what it means. Grab it by the throat and run with it.

Our tourism industry, while having experienced challenges throughout the pandemic, is well positioned to take advantage of Tasmania's reputation as a climate leader. As they say, listen to the science and avoid the climate Luddite tag. We do not want to be that. It does not do much for the reputation of the island. We cannot continue to live off past glories.

Most of our base load power is being produced by dams and turbines that were built in the 1940s and 1950s. Quite a lot of it was built with the help of migrants who came here after the Second World War. We need to be thinking about things like green hydrogen. Let us get the metrics right and make sure the business case stacks up. It could be a world leader. You have to make sure that the business case delivers.

Last year our tourism community announced Tasmania will become a carbon-neutral destination by 2025. It undertook a body of work to underpin this position in the market. It is good to see leadership from the tourism industry. Of course, there are many ways of measuring things. Being the pre-eminent city for research, and having more scientific researchers per head than any other city, we would be foolish not to listen to those scientists. We listened to the scientists on COVID-19. We got through that pretty well. We need to listen to the scientists when it comes to the climate change argument.

The Premier said:

Through our nation-leading emissions performance, delivering one of the best outcomes in the world, we will look to maximise the benefits available for our industry sectors and the businesses and jobs they support, by ensuring that we capitalise fully on our competitive advantages.

We do need to capitalise on our competitive advantages. We have to walk the walk. We have to close the political divide on this. It might suit some to have some points of difference. But we could be absolutely awesome if the policymakers across party lines pulled together on climate change.

This state is so well set up to be a major leader. Small as our emissions might be touted to be, we could be a major leader. Look at Switzerland and how it got that brand of quality for watches all those years ago. Tasmania, the renewable energy state. We have it in spades. We just have to make sure we come together on it for another purpose - climate change. If we could pull together on it across party lines, it would be really great. Would it not be great if candidates were chosen on their capacity to collaborate and work with each other, where no one individual had all the answers, and consensus reigned? And then he woke up.

Rather than cutting each other off at the knees and where science ruled rather than misguided aspiration, would it not be great if we had a parliament that did that? That is the challenge that I put to you with the climate change bill that is coming up.

Then the Premier goes on to talk about AFL, of all things, and sport. I can appreciate the reason sport is promoted, I can. It brings economic benefit to the state, there is no question

about that, which means that employment is improved. People say, we need to spend it on the hospitals and affordable housing and those sorts of things. They are things that are really important to us.

However, some would say if we do not have those sorts of facilities then how do you expect us to grow our employment? How do you expect us to have the gross state product that can support the community in producing more houses for people who do not have the wherewithal to own their own home or help them into a property where they rent? Or as the Government is helping them to do, almost a rent-buy situation or helping them by putting \$230 000 towards buying their first home. Some good things are happening there. I think it is a balance, it is always a balance.

I am not going to comment on that big stadium that we talked about yesterday, that \$750 million. The member for Elwick said something about 'the floating part' I did not actually think there was any 'floating part' on it. When he said that, I thought, it is not going to be floating is it?

**Ms Webb** - It juts out into the river.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Oh, it juts out? I do not know that is going to be a float. I think that is going to be reclaimed, is it not? It is not going to be floating -

**Mr Willie** - Well, semantics.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Yes.

**Ms Webb** - Who knows?

**Mr VALENTINE** - Well, that is probably a good comment, who knows? I had to say when I first saw that come to the paper, I thought, here we go, Oceanport. Can anyone remember Oceanport? It was the redevelopment of Princes Wharf No. 1, going back 20 years or more.

**Mr Gaffney** - Last century.

**Mr VALENTINE** - It was last century, member for Mersey, and I was there. I do remember Oceanport and how there was going to be this huge development of Princes Wharf No. 1. I did think a little bit about that when I saw this on the front page. I thought, I can see this happening again. There are going to be letters to the editor and all the rest of it but I will refrain from making a substantial comment because I do chair the Public Works Committee. I need to go into that committee with an open mind and I will leave it at that.

All of the activity when it comes to AFL and those sorts of sporting activities, is preventive health action. It is great except it is like scooters. The scooters sometimes can do all the work; crowds at the footy sit and watch and are not necessarily active. We need to look at preventive health programs that encompass a lot of the community. Going to watch football, it can be semi-active but does it really produce the goods when it comes to reducing the call on hospitals and the like? What it does do, it gets kids motivated to rise to the challenge, and anything that gets them away from their screens. I do not know how many parents there are here and how many children there are in your families. All I know is I have had my eyes on

what young kids do these days and there are a lot of them that need vitamin D. That is all I can say. I hope their parents are giving them vitamin D, because they spend a lot of time in front of screens. Their minds are active; I do not think anyone would suggest that screen activity is all bad. It can help develop the brain but they need to develop the body and get the vitamin D by going outside and kicking a footy. If the AFL can do that it is partly positive. Something has to get them out from in front of their screens, turn their square eyes back into round ones and the flat calf muscles into functioning muscles instead of sitting on chairs.

The JackJumpers and those sorts of teams have their spin-offs and certainly bring attention on Tasmania. That will be good for tourism, good for some activity, which is good. The Premier talks about the Dial Regional Sports Complex. We actually went to Penguin school as the Public Works Committee and had a look at that site.

**Ms Rattray** - You spend a lot of time on the north-west coast, if you do not mind.

**Mr VALENTINE** - Yes, we have actually. We must do the figures and see how it is spread across. I think the north-east has only just managed to get a little bit with the Sideling. It is activity, I suppose. The north-west needs those facilities too, just the same as the north and the south. It is interesting the way it is happening - north-west, then north, then south later. I will not make any comment on that with an election around the corner. The Premier goes on to talk more about the stadium. I will not go on to the stadium, personally, at this point. It says it will be a game changer for the state.

He says we are also building confidence in our waste resource recovery sectors, investing in plastics reprocessing, re-use of waste tiles and commercial composting, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution in our environment. What is not to like about that? Lots of people have been calling for that sort of action. It is good to see the Government is doing that.

He says we have also taken important steps to progress the structural organisational separation of the Environment Protection Authority from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment. I thought it was interesting to change the name of Parks and Wildlife to Department of Natural Resources and Environment. I thought that is an interesting way of putting it, but anyway. As long as it is not dropped off the radar. The new model will ensure public confidence in environmental regulation in Tasmania and promote certainty for proponents. I hope it does. The EPA is a very important organisation and needs to be able to do its job fully and effectively, and it needs to be properly funded to do that.

The Premier's Address then goes on to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people:

Late last year I committed to providing an update following the release of the Pathway to Truth-Telling and Treaty report. After receiving the report I wrote to Tasmanian Aboriginal organisations, seeking their feedback on the report's recommendations and what the next steps on our journey towards true reconciliation should look like.

The steps that the Premier has taken by having our past governor, Kate Warner, and Professor Tim McCormack, go through and provide the report that they have, was a very good step. They are very focused on the purpose. I wish the Premier well as he studies the recommendations that were made in that report. Obviously, it needs to be done with great care.



There are no universal views in the Aboriginal community about how some of that should come together with a treaty and the like. I talk with the voice of experience here as when I was on the council we had an Aboriginal reference group. It did not take much for that to unfortunately disband because of differences in opinion. It was the first one in the state and it came adrift because certain people were left out. I wish the Premier well and that is all I will say there. Great care is needed. There is a process and it is important the eyes are kept on the end point. It is important to maintain respect, focus and acknowledgement of the Aboriginal community, who are a proud people. I think I will call it there.

There are a couple of things I did not see in the Premier's Address. I notice it did not mention political donations. I am pretty sure it did not. The member for Nelson might correct me if I am wrong. That is something the community always talks about. We have to get this right and we need to not be the worst in the nation. It needs to be the best in the nation and we need to be leaders in this. It will come down to publicly funded elections and I believe that is what a lot of people are calling for. Why should the public fund it? If the public funds every candidate the same amount it levels the playing field and reduces the capacity for people to use financial levers to get the outcomes they want. It reduces pressure on individual people. Every member in the parliament could rightly stand up and feel they have the power to call things as they are, rather than worrying whether if they say x or y they will lose financial support. It is simple and probably the way it should go. We will wait for the debate before closing our mind on any of that.

The other one was the size of parliament. Over the last few months, we have seen people resign and that has put extra pressure on those in parliament. The number of portfolios that ministers in Tasmania have exceeds anywhere else in the nation. All that can do is provide the bureaucrats with a greater say. The ministers of the day cannot possibly be drilling down into all the issues of a matter as they do not have the time. I do not know how many portfolios one has. Seven portfolios? There is no way you have time to drill down each of the issues and make a conscious policy decision. You will listen to advice and the advisers get the power at the end of the day. Advisers are essential. They need to point up some of the issues to ministers. They need to show them if you go down that track you may have this response. Then it is up to the ministers to decide whether they want to go down that track. You need that capacity.

The size of parliament is something that needs to be debated downstairs. It is to do with downstairs more so than here. We had 19 members in this House and some would say we need to put it back, if they increase the size downstairs. It is the reduction in Independent members here that is the problem. We need Independents. I am not preaching to the converted, to nine members in this House, because you are party members. The community needs to be happy that the review process in this Chamber can happen without fear or favour. It is very difficult for members of Government to call out a problem or an issue with legislation that the Government has brought forward. How do you do that? You have to toe the party line.

If they are Opposition, that is natural. Sometimes, the suggestions from the Opposition might not be taken as seriously, because they think it is just because they are Opposition.

This House is a House of review and we need to keep our eyes on that. As a community I say that.

The problem with lower numbers is the backbenchers who are absolutely stretched. The backbenchers are the ones who do all the committee work. For the most part, you do not have ministers on committees. You do on the Integrity Committee, but for the most part it is backbenchers. There are so few backbenchers they are stretched. One backbencher has the Public Accounts Committee, the Subordinate Legislation Committee and the Public Works Committee. You roll all those together and it is huge work. I am giving those backbenchers a shout-out. In some ways, they would have as much work on their plate as a minister, when you roll it all together. All power to them, but there needs to be more of them for the parliament to effectively operate.

That is the last I have to say. You will be thankful I am finished, but it has to be said. I note the Premier's Address.

[12.12 p.m.]

**Ms SIEJKA** (Pembroke) - Mr President, in his Address speech, the Premier claimed that:

Right now, there is a quiet confidence in Tasmania.

In his speech we heard yet again so many references to announceables, including infrastructure, construction and sport. We even heard we have a new floating stadium. Debatable, but anyhow that is one way to refer to it. This is to complement the many other infrastructure projects that have been announced, but not yet delivered.

We had far less on addressing the cost of living and ensuring that those most vulnerable amongst us can access the same social and economic opportunities we should all be afforded. Many Tasmanians, but particularly our vulnerable Tasmanians, do not have the luxury of a quiet confidence the Premier claims. They remain apprehensive that the Government is still not getting the basics right. The same opportunities are not afforded for all Tasmanians.

Since the borders opened on 15 December 2021 we have seen considerable disruption and change to our way of living. While some in the community have been minimally impacted by this particular strain, kept safe by mask wearing, hygiene practices and social distancing, not all have been so lucky. We are seeing increasingly more of us are not so lucky too.

There are also particularly vulnerable cohorts who continue to live in fear and confusion, many of whom worry they have been forgotten and who are at greater risk of being particularly unwell. I am referring to cohorts such as older people, children and young people and those living with a disability.

An area in which my office has been inundated with questions and requests for support is within the area of aged care, particularly in relation to the constantly changing COVID-19 environment that they were experiencing as the borders opened. We have been contacted by loved ones who are concerned about the times they have been unable to visit their loved ones residing in an aged care home, and with fear for what current policy and practice would mean in the event of an extended lockdown.

Whilst the Government did work with individual homes to establish COVID-19 plans for each of them, it seems that some of the advice and protocols are interpreted differently. For example, one family provides additional care to their loved one residing in a dementia ward in the northern suburbs. It is very common for family members to visit loved ones regularly to

assist with personal care and feeding. The home in which this person resides restricts visits in line with the state government supported plan. Yet, in another aged care home I am aware of, they allow visitors at any time, including for designated visitors during lockdown and sweep tests, as long as appropriate strategies are in place, such as the wearing of full PPE.

I am not going to get into whether the Public Health advice should be questioned, but I do think families are confused and that clarity and communication are desperately needed. This is still the case some time after the borders have opened. As we are all aware, many of these people have limited time left, and we have seen the impact of extended lockdowns in homes interstate. After two years, this is an area I feel the Government has had plenty of time to address and get right and to ensure that these separations are avoided. This is an area where we are not looking out for those most in need.

Aged care is not the only area in which confusion and lack of support has occurred. At the other end of the age spectrum, children and the early education sector have also been an issue throughout the pandemic. At an eastern shore early learning centre, Cambridge Road Play and Learn, the management felt they needed to redirect a specific staff member to be responsible for keeping on top of the constantly changing rules, rule requirements, directions affecting their workforce and the children enrolled. They showed me a spreadsheet that this person had set up to make sure that everything they were passing on to people was accurate. They felt that the information on the website and through emails was just too confusing.

I think it is alarming that the directions and protocols were considered to be so confusing and uncertain that they needed to do this when they are already very busy in these centres. It certainly appears that the sector is still in need of additional support to address the ongoing impact on their workforce and centre as well.

Early learning centres and schools are where COVID-19 is arguably having the most impact at present. As we are all well aware, the rollout of vaccines for 5- to 12-year-olds began only during the school holidays, not allowing time for everyone to access it, and with their second and booster shots some way into the future. Under-5s, as yet, do not have access to any vaccine programs, thus placing them also at potential further risk.

Over the last few weeks we have seen the destruction and stress that outbreaks have placed on all involved in the education system. Many concerns for the education system remain. Winter is coming. Ventilation remains an issue within schools. The ability to staff the early learning and school systems is a problem as is ensuring children and young people receive the education they need despite these continued disruptions.

The best thing we can do for our state's economic future is to ensure our children and young people get the best start in life. Sadly, Tasmania has the worst education results of any state. It is the worst performing state across every age group for reading, spelling, grammar and punctuation; second worst in every age group in writing; and the worst in years 5, 7 and 9 in numeracy. As Tasmanian children move through the education system they fall further behind.

Over the past 10 years Tasmania's results have gone backwards in 14 of the 20 indicators measured by NAPLAN. This impacts every aspect of a young person's future social and economic prospects. We have 39 per cent of our school leavers not engaged in work or further

study. We have more than 4000 unemployed young Tasmanians, which is higher than the national average.

Our key industries - building and construction, agriculture, tourism and hospitality - have called for help to address the skills shortages but not enough has been done. COVID-19 exacerbates all these concerns. Not addressing this adequately and urgently has very real long-term consequences for the future of our children. Already one in four people experiencing homelessness are young people, and more than 40 per cent of year 12 students report experiencing mental health symptoms such as anxiety. What does the future hold for our young people if we do not act now?

In the area of disability COVID-19 also continues to be a live concern. Whilst the Premier outlines high vaccination rates for Tasmania, there remain concerns about access to vaccines for people living with disability. This is especially an issue for those who are housebound and rely on the support of others, or who are alone, for access.

I have been contacted by disability support workers who were concerned for the people in the supported accommodation that they worked in, worried about how someone who could not leave the house would be vaccinated. Some of these issues are resolved as either situations change or after seeking advice. Again, clear communication would alleviate many of these problems. As with aged care, there is particular concern within disability for those reliant on personal care. We have seen how those with complex health needs and underlying conditions remain most at risk.

Many Tasmanians with disability are doing it tough. Many of those on the NDIS have reported cuts to their plan whilst other struggle to access vital supports. Last year numerous state-funded disability organisation lost their core funding. This means that it is now even harder for people living with disability to have their needs met. Added to this, there have been four ministers within the space of 12 months and a departmental change imminent. Combining all of these impacts, many Tasmanians living with a disability are struggling even more in this current environment.

Food relief agencies and community organisations are reporting that there is a greater need for their services than ever before. The Neighbourhood House in Warrane told me that they are easily seeing double the number of people coming to them for help to provide food for their families. They are struggling to meet that demand. They purchase the food hampers directly from charities such as Foodbank Australia. Unfortunately, these costs have increased and the selection of food has become more limited, meaning that it can be hard for clients to create a meal with what is provided. Whilst the Neighbourhood House does what it can to support those who come to them, they are struggling, as they also have lost income because of a decrease in program attendance due to COVID-19. They have had to look at other ways to raise revenue and should be commended for trying to be innovative, but are they finding the situation increasingly difficult.

Food relief agencies also report that rising fuel costs are having a significant impact on their ability to service their clients, vulnerable Tasmanians. Yes, they are eligible for a grants program but only when they have expended other funds, funds which are meant to be for the food itself.

The community sector is struggling to meet client demands in additional ways. The state government funded TasCOSS to deliver the COVID-19 Service Continuity Supplies Fund. This funding was made available to provide financial assistance to community service organisations in Tasmania for the provision of personal protection equipment, rapid antigen tests for use by the workforce and other COVID-19-related supplies. The initial grants available for the purchase of equipment, not available through other funds, went in only a couple of days. This is with an additional \$100 000 being provided very quickly, which also went in the blink of an eye. No further funding was made available, yet the demand remains with all these increasing case numbers.

Services need to find their funds within their already stretched budgets to protect their workforce and clients. This seems to be a grant program that could easily have continued with such demand noticed, especially as it looks set to continue into the future with the emergence of different strains and, sadly, rising case numbers.

We all know and agree that housing is a human right but what is happening right now in Tasmania is that many people are shut out of the dream of home ownership. There are families trapped in an insecure rental cycle. Hobart is now the least affordable capital city for renters. There are many homeless Tasmanians and many more on housing waitlists. Our shelters are full and are no longer just for crisis accommodation. There is limited transitional accommodation available to people in their local community. Tasmanians are living in their cars. The number of Tasmanians on the housing waiting list continues to increase. There are now about 4300 Tasmanians on the housing waitlist. Think about that - 4300. It is a huge number of people who need homes.

How are Tasmanians meant to find security when there are simply not enough houses available, rents are sky-high, and saving for a house deposit is an impossibility with the current cost of living? Two consecutive quarters of population decline indicate people feel they have no choice but to leave Tasmania.

All the basics keep getting more expensive. Wages are not keeping up. The inflation rate is now 4.5 per cent, well above the 3 per cent rate of wage growth. A CommSec report does not mean much to the young person who cannot get a foot in the door of the property market, or to the young mum who is homeless with her five kids living in a car. It does not mean much to the person living with a disability who is unable to afford travelling to appointments or accessing the services they need. The Government claims to be spending record amounts on health, housing, and education. They claim we are in a sound financial position. They claim to be good economic managers, but the reality is that very little has changed for Tasmanians in almost a decade. If anything, things are worse for many and our financial position continues to deteriorate.

There is no quiet confidence among many Tasmanians that I can see. That was going to conclude my contribution, but I want to touch on what was being said about the increase in the size of parliament and Independent versus party. I think we have to remember the community elects us. They send us here. We are representing them, whether we are a party person or an Independent person.

**Mr Valentine** - Absolutely, I agree.

**Ms SIEJKA** - Yes. The Opposition has a role, the Government has a role, Independents have a role. It is important to note that only the party members know what goes on in their party, what debate ensues and the processes involved that lead to what happens in here. We should remember we are not all privy to every discussion that goes on. We all have a role. Our community has sent us here. It is up to them at the end of the day. This is what they have decided.

[12.27 p.m.]

**Ms HOWLETT** (Prosser) - Mr President, I rise to speak in strong support of the Premier's Address. About a month after Peter Gutwein became Tasmania's 46<sup>th</sup> Premier, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Mr Gutwein faced a calamity that no Tasmanian premier has faced in more than a hundred years. Thousands of Tasmanians lost their jobs. Businesses closed and Australia went into lockdown.

However, it became quickly apparent that Peter Gutwein was the right person at the right time to lead our state. He acted swiftly and decisively, closing our borders to hotspots and implementing travel restrictions to keep us safe. Because of this, Tasmania avoided the lengthy and gruelling lockdowns that other Australian states endured.

To support Tasmania's economy, the Gutwein Government implemented an infrastructure and employment package to help Tasmanians recover jobs. To support businesses, we implemented the most generous economic and social support package in the country. Because of these measures, Tasmania has been hailed as the state with the best performing economy, strongest job market and lowest unemployment in the most recent CommSec State of the States reports.

I commend the Premier for his leadership throughout the pandemic. He promised to keep Tasmanians safe and he promised to rebuild the economy. He has delivered on both of these promises. Peter Gutwein leads a government that addresses the issues affecting Tasmanians and delivers positive results. I thoroughly endorse the Government's plan that was announced in the Premier's State of the State speech that will see more than \$1.5 billion invested to provide more housing, with a 10-year housing package to build on our existing reforms. This will provide further affordable housing. By adding to our already existing building program, we aim to deliver 3500 new dwellings and homes by 2026-27.

I also thoroughly endorse the Government's continued \$5 billion investment in infrastructure, that aims to create and support 25 000 jobs across the state and fund infrastructure upgrades and developments when they are most needed, particularly in my electorate of Prosser. The most significant of these investments for Prosser is the \$350 million South East Traffic Solution. As it stands, there has been significant progress on the Hobart Airport interchange, which is replacing the Hobart roundabout with an overpass. This project is expected to be completed in late 2022. The upgrade of the intersection at Midway Point is progressing well and is expected to be finished in mid-2022. Significant progress has been made on the Sorell Southern Bypass, which is expected to be completed this year.

The next projects in the South East Traffic Solution pipeline are the duplication of the Tasman Highway between the airport and Midway Point causeway, which will begin this year, and the duplication of the Midway Point and Sorell causeways which will commence in 2023.

We have also committed \$112.3 million towards the \$576 million new Bridgewater Bridge. For many years, the residents of south-east Tasmania have been calling for investments to ease the traffic congestion between Brighton, Sorell and Hobart. The Tasmanian Liberal Government has listened to these calls and we are building the necessary infrastructure that will ease the congestion between Hobart and its growing outer suburbs.

The northern and southern midlands, the east coast and Tasman Peninsula are also benefitting from the Government's investment in infrastructure. More than \$20 million is being invested in the upgrade of the Great Eastern Drive, as part of our investment to improve infrastructure critical to the Tasmanian visitor economy. More than \$60 million has been put towards state road upgrades, including Mud Walls Road, Richmond Road and Highland Lakes Road.

A further \$6 million has been committed for a pedestrian underpass in Campbell Town. Once completed, the underpass will allow pedestrians, particularly children and the elderly, to move safely across High Street and it will improve traffic flow along the Campbell Town section of the Midland Highway. In addition, \$1 million is being committed to commence a resurfacing of Wielangta Road, which will transform the road into an alternate access road to the east coast as well as a scenic tourist route.

We have also invested \$15.9 million to increase the capacity of the South East Irrigation Scheme to meet the growing demand for water from irrigators in the region. As Mr Barnett would say, liquid gold.

Not only is this Government investing record amounts of funding into infrastructure, it is also investing record amounts into health and education. In Prosser, the municipalities of Brighton and Sorell are experiencing an influx of new residents. Many of these residents have young families and are beginning the next stage of their life. These families want to send their children to their local school. To cater for this, the Government has invested \$25.3 million for the construction of a new school at Sorell. The new school will provide state-of-the-art kindergarten to year 12 learning facilities, transforming it into the key educational facility in south-east Tasmania.

We are also investing in new early childhood and family learning centres in the municipality. This means a child will be able to complete their entire pre-tertiary education in Sorell from when they attend preschool right through to year 12.

Health and emergency services in Sorell will benefit from the \$12 million investment in the construction of the new school and a new emergency service hub. Once completed, this modern and well-equipped hub will house all of Sorell's emergency personnel. It will also allow SES personnel to be stationed in Sorell and will provide the infrastructure needed to call for volunteers to join the service.

The Sorell Community Health Centre has also received an increase in funding. Job seekers in the south-east will continue to receive support through extending the operation of the South East Employment Hub.

For the Brighton Municipality we are constructing a new Brighton High School. As it stands, Brighton Primary School is one of the largest primary schools in Tasmania. The school accommodates over 600 students from Brighton and surrounding municipalities, yet most

students must travel out of the area to attend a high school. The new state-of-the-art 7-12 high school will be located close to the existing primary school and will have the capacity for more than 600 students. Once completed, students will be able to complete their pre-tertiary education studies in Brighton. In addition to the new Brighton High School, we are redeveloping the Jordan River Learning Federation School, commonly referred to as the Brighton School Farm.

To assist job seekers in Brighton and Southern Midlands, we have opened a new South Central Regional Jobs Hub.

In many areas of my electorate there have been significant investments to enhance health, emergency services and education and \$3.5 million is being provided to upgrade the Midlands Multi-Purpose Health Centre. The upgrades to these centres will be focused on increasing the comfort and facilities for patients and residents, including delivering improved bathroom access and privacy. Funding has been provided for new paramedics in Dodges Ferry, Swansea and Campbell Town.

In Campbell Town we are investing \$2 million over three years to upgrade and expand the agricultural VET programs at Campbell Town District High School.

Prosser is also benefiting from significant investments in tourism. Infrastructure that is being provided by this Government includes: \$8.3 million over four years for the Freycinet Peninsula Wastewater project; \$6 million over four years for the \$7.2 million Freycinet Tourism Icon project; and \$2.8 million for the Maria Island Rediscovered project to commence in 2023. On the Tasman Peninsula we have invested \$2.1 million towards a \$7.8 million Three Capes Track Stage 3 project. We are also investing to grow and strengthen tourism on Tasmanian's east coast, with \$50 000 to develop a tourism master plan for the east coast region and \$35 000 to develop new marketing projects for East Coast Tourism Tasmania.

Prosser has benefited from numerous other investments across the electorate that include \$400 000 to redevelop the Carlton Park Surf Life Saving Club; \$40 000 for accessible toilet facilities at the Tunbridge Community Club; \$135 000 for structural repairs to the Tea Tree Community Hall; \$200 000 to upgrade the Pontville Park pavilion and develop a dog area; \$150 000 for upgrades to netball shelters and storage facilities at Spring Bay recreation ground; \$25 000 for the installation of a disabled platform lift in the Swansea RSL; \$150 000 over two years for the East Coast Rock Lobster Translocation Program; and \$60 000 for renovations and new disability toilet at the Bicheno Golf Club.

As members would be aware, I recently stepped down from Cabinet. I do not wish to dwell on the reasons for this or some of the unfortunate commentary surrounding it in the other place. What I do wish to confirm today is I remain absolutely committed to the electorate of Prosser and representing those who reside within the electorate.

I am proud to be a member of the Premier, Mr Gutwein's team and I am looking forward to continuing to be so, for a long time to come, subject of course to the views of the people in the electorate of Prosser.

Before I conclude, I pass on my sincere thanks and best wishes for our first responders, hospital staff, medical volunteers and those people in the public service who went above and beyond during the past two years to keep us safe.



I wish to conclude by thanking the Premier, Peter Gutwein for his commitment to our state. He leads a strong, united, compassionate government that is delivering for all Tasmanians.

Madam Acting President, I note the Premier's Address.

[12.41 p.m.]

**Ms ARMITAGE** (Launceston) - Madam Acting President, the Premier's Address is certainly a good point at which we can take a look at how Tasmania has performed and will continue to perform as we move forward in time.

There is a good amount of evidence to show we are fiscally in a more prosperous position than we have been in the past and the COVID-19 pandemic certainly brought that into sharp focus. We have been removed from some of the more serious shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but we have certainly not been immune.

Twenty-eight Tasmanians have died due to COVID-19. We have had over 73 000 cases and we continue to see the COVID-19 charts record more and more Tasmanian infections.

I myself have been in quarantine last week, owing to a close contact in my household. You do not really appreciate what it is like to be free until all of a sudden you are locked up, and that was only for seven days. Imagine my distress, working in the garden, when I get a phone call from my son from his bedroom from which I was pleased he actually had not come out to say, Mum, I have just last night recorded a positive test. Now he had no symptoms, but because many of his other workmates had COVID-19, he thought as he had a RAT test at home, it was wise to take a test. Unfortunately, it came up positive. Fortunate for him, as I said he had no symptoms. I made him stay in his bedroom and delivered meals outside his door and I have to say I did not sight him for seven days. Probably much of the reason we remained COVID-19 negative, which was a good thing, but of course, all of sudden you realise the events you cannot go to including the Launceston Chamber of Commerce dinner.

Most unfortunate, when on Day 6, which is really Day 7, because Day 1 is Day 0, you record a negative test, but you still cannot leave quarantine until after midnight. The Chamber of Commerce dinner would have been well and truly over by midnight. I could have gone down there at midnight, but unfortunately it would be over, even though I recorded a negative test. These are the breaks. However, I survived.

**Madam ACTING PRESIDENT** - Next year.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Next year. I survived seven days. Bruce barely survived. He was lucky. I think he could have harmed me as much as I could have harmed him and I know it would have happened if we had been 14 days in a hotel room. I do feel for those people who have been locked up in a hotel in quarantine in the past. But the virus has crept in and we are now learning to live with it.

This is in contrast to the world we were living in two years ago, when the COVID-19 virus was still novel and we had no idea what was coming.

Madam Acting President, Tasmanians have adapted extraordinarily well to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have all contributed to the state we have today. It was ordinary

Tasmanians who bore the brunt of restrictions on work and socialising, many to their detriment. It was ordinary Tasmanian businesses that changed the way they delivered their products and services in order to keep their staff on. It was ordinary Tasmanians who taught their kids at home, and managed to muddle through with their other work and home commitments. I believe some have continued to teach their children at home and discovered it was quite good and worked quite well.

As for Tasmanian businesses, I discovered a lot of great restaurants that home-deliver. Some unfortunately have stopped the home-delivery. I wish they had continued. It was really good that it gave us the chance to try some things that we might not have otherwise tried. There is always good with bad.

It follows then that Tasmanians should all be sharing in the prosperous position we now find ourselves in. It is difficult to go a week without seeing what new strains Tasmanians are facing, whether it be rental stress, house prices, petrol prices, or health care. We want all Tasmanians to be able to share in the prosperous position we find ourselves in. I want us as lawmakers to have our priorities right.

Health and hospitals continue to be especially important to me. I understand that the Government in its 2021-22 Budget included \$10.7 billion for Health over four years to target immediate needs such as reducing elective surgery waitlists, opening more beds and employing more staff. We need to listen to our regional hospitals and provide them with the tools and funding necessary to properly manage our hospitals, and attract and retain talented health professionals. This particularly goes for places like Launceston and the north-west.

I worked at the Launceston General Hospital in the mid-1970s. It truly was a place of excellence in training, where staff, especially doctors, were desperate to work. It was a great training hospital. Somehow, in some way, we have lost our way somewhat and I really do not know how we can find it again. It does not matter what colour government is or how much money you throw at Health, it does not seem to get a lot better.

I acknowledge the hard work of all the staff at the hospital. Whether it be the nurses, the doctors, the ancillary staff, the cleaners, people on the wards, they work so hard. How often do we see in the paper someone who has been to the hospital stating that they went to the hospital and were looked after and cared for well? Sometimes with all the difficulties we have, particularly with Health, we forget to mention how much we appreciate those people, and how much they go above and beyond. It is the long hours. It is not just them, it is their families as well. We appreciate what they do. Without them, we would not have a hospital. We always have plenty of patients but without those staff, it does not matter how beautiful your hospital is, there is nothing there. It is important to stress how hard working and well trained and dedicated our staff are.

It was interesting to read in the newspaper, I think it was on Friday, the AMA President Dr Omar Khorsid saying we need a long-term plan and solution for our public hospitals. It is so easy to say that, but no-one seems to come up with one. That is the thing. You hear the doctors saying this is what we need, but someone needs to come up with what the plan is. It does not matter whether you are red, blue or green in government. It is a very difficult thing. I can say we need this in the hospital, but how do you deliver it? It does not seem to matter how much money you throw at it.

It is a very hard thing. Low bed ratios for elderly people, longer waits in the ED. We all know the longer you are in the emergency department the worse outcome you have. It is the same thing in elective surgeries. The longer you wait for an elective surgery, all of a sudden an elective surgery becomes an emergency surgery, which means you wait longer. How do we fix it? I do not think anybody knows. This is the real problem. It is very easy to accuse a government of what they are not doing. But nobody seems to know what should be done.

The Launceston General Hospital Precinct Masterplan is another such initiative that requires a lot of coordination between a number of different parties to be able to deliver a hospital that is able to provide northern Tasmanians with the health services they require and deserve. As I said, you can have beautiful new hospitals with the best equipment, but primarily you need the staff because there is no shortage of patients.

It is worth mentioning the new Calvary Hospital that is proposed to go on the land adjacent. I have asked questions in the past but it is really important that when the new hospital is built it is not just a combination of two campuses on one site. We do not want it to be just one Calvary where we have now combined St Luke's and St Vincent's campuses on one site; great for them, but not so good for the community and public. We also need some new services there to assist the Launceston General Hospital. I would also like to see our new hospice there. I am sure that they will move their Melwood Wing, which they now have at St Luke's. It is a great service, but it is not on the ground floor. I know that Barb Baker and her group have been wanting a new standalone hospice for a long time. I do not know that we are ever likely to get it.

If the new Calvary Hospital could have their hospice facilities on a ground floor with access to outside, with trees and grass, it would certainly be a step in the right direction. While they are waiting for a standalone hospice it would certainly be nicer than being on a ward. Sometimes when it is not full with palliative patients, it might have other patients in it. It would be the most awful thing for a patient, when you are palliative, to have other patients in a ward who are actually going home. It must be terrible. It would be really nice to have at least a ground floor for the hospice, if they could, with the new Calvary Hospital. I will continue to lobby that group, as I have done in the past, and ask questions.

I cannot speak on the Address without mentioning the proposed new \$750 million stadium in the south. I am not going to say a lot. I am sure a big ticket item like this would help us in the case for an AFL football team bid and would certainly boost our chances of hosting major sport or entertainment events. However, it does not provide a guarantee of any of those things. With a significant investment in Launceston by way of the Launceston City Deal, the millions of dollars that have been channelled over the years into the university precinct and the upgrades that have gone into UTAS Stadium, or York Park, makes me question the need for another stadium in the state's south. I genuinely am not being parochial here. I know that is probably not going to be believed by the Chamber. With the proposed work to be done at UTAS stadium that would take the seating capacity up to 27 500, it would be the ideal home for an AFL team, with Launceston being central to the state and close to the mainland by both sea and air.

Like other members here, I am also horrified at the stories we hear week in and week out about the strife happening in the property market and within the housing construction industry. With the ballooning of house prices, low interest rates and the fear-of-missing-out factor driving many people to buy or build now, the market has become ruthless. I have heard of

people whose building contracts have been entered into in good faith, having them pulled out from them on technicalities so that their property can be sold at a better price. This is the sort of event that can cause a significant amount of stress and sadness. It is apparently happening to many people.

Also, like other members, my electorate office often gets calls from constituents in housing stress. I have endeavoured to help people who have been on the housing waitlist for 12 months or more, but unfortunately there is little to nothing that we really can do to help. Of course, they might be my constituent today, yours tomorrow - the member for Windermere or the member for Rosevears. They move around because they have nowhere to go. It is very sad. Many of them have children and some of them have mental health issues as well, which makes it even harder for them.

**Mr Valentine** - That is the problem, isn't it? They can be nobody's constituents because they do not have a home to go to.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Absolutely. It is very, very hard. You have to rely on them trying to get back in touch with you to try to find them help. All too often there is really nothing that we can do because we cannot produce houses that do not exist.

I am pleased therefore to see that some measures have been introduced to help people on lower incomes enter the housing market through things like the Housing Market Entry Program. The provision of financial assistance measures will certainly be a help to people who struggle to raise enough for a deposit or have difficulty obtaining finance by extending the First Home Owner Grant. As mentioned previously, I believe the First Home Owner Grant should be renamed the first home builder's grant, as it does discriminate against those who cannot afford to build a first home but could afford to buy an older home.

I appreciate the 50 per cent rebate on duty. But even on a medium-priced house this would equate to a saving of around \$11 000, which we were told in briefings is a third of that being provided to other first homebuyers. How is this fair or equitable? While I appreciate it was able to assist the building industry, which is now doing very well - and try to get a builder if you can - together with the old excuse that to do otherwise inflates the real estate price, I do not accept that. Having been in real estate in the past, all the first home owner's grant did was to help provide with a deposit. Vendors have always wanted as much as they can for their properties but they do not know who is going to buy it and they do not add money on if it is a first homebuyer. As always, the market demands the price and it does not mean they put more on it because they might get a first homebuyer. I have heard the story time and time again and do not agree, having been in the industry.

Last year the parliament passed the Housing Land Supply Amendment Bill, which targeted under-utilised or vacant land suitable for residential purposes and the provision of social and affordable housing for the making of housing land supply orders. I was one of a few members in this place who resisted this piece of legislation, and I admit that. It stripped away too many powers vested within our local councils to meaningfully have a say about planning that actually occurs within their local government area. The front-facing level of government, which would have the most knowledge about the best use for land and what the people living in their local government area want and need, had their processes wiped away.

I entirely understand the need for intervention in the housing and rental markets for Tasmanians. People are under significant stress and face a great deal of uncertainty; however, I did not believe then, and still do not, that hollowing out the influence and abilities of Tasmanian local councils to have their say over such land and assets is of benefit. I do not think these two things are incompatible but I restate at this juncture our local councils have an important part to play in the planning processes.

With regards to education, as always, I am heartened to see investment in our state's future, our children. We all know a quality education leads to better outcomes in a person's life, it is longer, healthier and provides pathways to more opportunities to participate in work and in society. It will likely not be years until we realise the full effect the pandemic, consequent lockdowns and health consequences will have had on our children. It is important we work now to set them up for success and support into the future. In this context, I do not just mean educational support. I mean support for mental and physical health and wellbeing, providing opportunities to feel connected with their peers, their schools, communities and families and having educational pathways that do justice to their dreams and aspirations.

I accept that now all high schools have extended to provide senior secondary options, our kids who are moving into the adult world will have greater access to higher education. However, I still believe in cities such as Launceston and Hobart, where our colleges are easily accessible, it must be difficult to have all subjects catered for sufficiently in these high schools for years 11 and 12. There is a dearth of qualified teachers for many of these pre-tertiary subjects. If we continue with years 11 and 12 in our high schools, it makes sense, for example, to have one public college in Launceston, with two campuses. This is not to say apprenticeships and traineeships should be neglected. The Tasmanian economy, the businesses and organisations who rely on skilled employees should be listened to when it comes to education policy.

**Mr Valentine** - Are you saying years 11 and 12 are impacted in some way or are you saying where they are conducted?

**Ms ARMITAGE** - I believe they are impacting in some way on our colleges. In areas such as Launceston, where we have high schools such as Queechy, Kings Meadows, Riverside, we have a lot of high schools in very close proximity to our two colleges, yet we have two colleges. I understand high schools being extended in areas where it is a long way from a college, but when you have them a short bus ride and you have the lack or difficulty getting enough pre-tertiary teachers for those subjects, it would be sensible to have our two colleges, as in Newstead and Launceston for example, combined into one college and have two campuses. It would make more sense when one college has a lot more students than the other, in order to make them viable and a sensible option. I have heard in the past that one college might have a huge number of students in a particular subject, with one or two teachers. The other college might have a limited number, but still needs the same number of teachers.

It would make more sense to have each college with certain subjects, particularly with the difficulty getting teachers, as we heard in the past with teachers trained in sciences. How often have we heard we might have PE teachers teaching science or their training is in something else?

**Mr Valentine** - They are teaching outside their skills.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Absolutely. It does make it really difficult. I understand why it has happened and I see it is a great thing in some of the outlying rural areas, but in areas such as Hobart and Launceston, I cannot quite see the benefit there and a detriment -

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

## **QUESTIONS**

### **Care for Patients with Long COVID-19**

**Mr DUGAN question to DEPUTY LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms PALMER**

[2.31 p.m.]

Mr President. I have a couple of questions to ask on behalf of the absent member for Murchison.

With regard to the ongoing medical care and support for Tasmanians experiencing ongoing symptoms following a COVID-19 infection, suffering a condition known as 'long COVID-19':

- (1) Are there specific multidisciplinary health services available to assist patients with ongoing symptoms including fatigue? If so, where are these services located and how are they accessed?

If not, what services, including multidisciplinary services, can those who are impacted access locally to support them?

- (2) Is there specific financial support available to assist Tasmanians experiencing ongoing symptoms following a COVID-19 infection, including fatigue, who are unable to return to work?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Windermere for asking these questions.

- (1) Long COVID-19 is not yet fully understood and symptoms are highly variable and wideranging. Given this variability, clinical needs are best assessed by a general practitioner and follow-up referrals made for areas of concern. Symptoms can range from mild to disabling cognitive and physical symptoms with significant impacts on quality of life, even for patients whose acute source of illness was mild. It is not yet known how long symptoms of long COVID-19 will last. There is no specific treatment for this condition.

The Department of Health continues to monitor evidence from across Australia and internationally. Tasmanians with long COVID-19 are primarily managed by their GP, who will assess care needs of the individual and make referrals to other specialist allied health therapy services where appropriate. Patients with long COVID-19 may access private or public allied health therapies or other ongoing specialist services depending on

their clinical needs. Primary Health Tasmania has developed a post COVID-19 condition health pathway to guide clinicians in assessing and managing patients with long COVID-19. This is available for general practitioners and other health professionals via the Primary Health Tasmania website:

[www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/4-health-professionals/tasmanian/healthpathways/](http://www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/4-health-professionals/tasmanian/healthpathways/)

Ensuring care is supported in a primary care setting where appropriate will help reduce avoidable emergency department presentations and hospital admissions.

Like other chronic diseases, if people with long COVID-19 need eligibility for a GP management plan and team care arrangement, support can be provided by Medicare for multidisciplinary services.

- (2) As with any post-viral syndrome where people are unable to return to work, people with long COVID-19 would be able to access sick leave in the workplace if employed, and negotiate a return to work plan.

### **Cases of Long COVID-19**

**Mr DUGAN question to DEPUTY LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms PALMER**

[2.35 p.m.]

Mr President, a subsequent question with regard to Tasmanians experiencing ongoing symptoms following a COVID-19 infection, suffering a condition known as long COVID-19.

- (1) Is there any information available to identify the percentage of patients who contract COVID-19 and develop symptoms of long COVID-19?

If so, please provide estimates or actual figures available.

- (2) How many people have presented to Public Health facilities and outpatient clinics with symptoms of long COVID-19 since March 2020?
- (3) Is there any information available to identify the number of people being treated for symptoms of long COVID-19 by their general practitioners?

### **ANSWER**

Again I thank the member for Windermere for asking these questions on behalf of the member for Murchison.

- (1) Long COVID-19 is not yet fully understood and the symptoms are highly variable and wideranging. Symptoms can range from mild to disabling with significant impacts on quality of life, even for patients whose acute source of illness was mild. It is not yet known how long symptoms of long COVID-19 will last, and there is no specific treatment for this condition.

A recent population-based cohort study in New South Wales following 94 per cent of confirmed cases between April and July 2020, found that 20 per cent of the COVID-19 survivors still experience symptoms within a month and around 5 per cent at 3 months.

Early this year it was estimated that 2.4 per cent of people that test positive to COVID-19 in the UK experienced long COVID-19, with the definition being that they experienced symptoms persisting for more than four weeks after their first COVID-19 infection which could not be explained via something else.

Current advice is that vaccinated individuals are less likely to experience long COVID-19, and vaccinated individuals who get long COVID-19 typically experience symptoms that are less severe and last for a shorter period of time.

The current view is that long COVID-19 associated with the Omicron variant, is less severe than previous variants. Most people who develop long COVID-19 will be managed by their general practitioner and the Department of Health does not have access to general practice data that might help to determine what proportion of people who contract COVID-19 will develop long COVID-19.

- (2) Defining long COVID-19 is still evolving nationally and internationally, particularly with the range of symptoms that people can experience and the varying length of time that people may experience their symptoms.

The Department of Health has been liaising with the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority to determine better ways to code various COVID-19-related conditions, which may assist in monitoring how many people with long COVID-19 require hospitalisation.

The national classification for outpatient activity is coded according to the clinic type. For example, the provider and setting, physiotherapy outpatient clinic, not the patient's condition or diagnosis. So, it is not possible to determine the number of people with long COVID-19 who have been treated in our outpatient clinics.

The Department of Health is aware of the potential for long COVID-19 and will monitor its prevalence. Tasmanians with long COVID-19 are primarily managed by their GP, who will escalate their care when appropriate. Primary Health Tasmania has developed a post COVID-19 condition health pathway to guide clinicians in assessing and managing patients with long COVID-19.

As previously identified, the health department does not have access to general practice data that might help to determine what number of people are being for treated for symptoms of long COVID-19 by their general practitioner.



## **Ashley Youth Detention Centre - Future Use**

### **Ms RATTRAY question to DEPUTY LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms PALMER**

[2.40 p.m.]

Mr President, information has been received to suggest that the Government has made contact with a senior member of a building contractor in regard to the current the Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) site, indicating that it is definitely going to be the location for the establishment of the northern correctional facility for adult prisoners. My questions are:

- (1) Can the Deputy Leader please advise if that contact has been made?
- (2) If so, when does the Government plan on advising the community of this decision?
- (3) Has the community feedback through the information sessions been collated? Has the report been made publicly available?

### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the honourable member for her questions.

- (1) The Department of Justice has advised that to their knowledge, no contact has been made with a senior member of a building contractor in regard to the Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC) site definitely becoming the location for the northern correctional facility (NCF).
- (2) The Government reiterates that no decision on the future of the AYDC site has been made.
- (3) Community feedback through face-to-face information sessions and written submissions on the future use of the AYDC site as a potential location for the NCF closed on 14 March 2022. The consultation process involved 16 public information sessions, which were attended by around 143 people, with a presence at every session held. In addition to these face-to-face meetings, the Department of Justice also received written submissions from the community. Feedback received is now being considered and used to inform the Government's decision about the future use of the AYDC site.

## **Tasmanian AFL Licence and Games Scheduling**

### **Ms RATTRAY question to DEPUTY LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms PALMER**

[2.42 p.m.]

Mr President, should the AFL grant a licence for a Tasmanian football team, which is possibly/probably contingent on building a new covered stadium in Hobart, my questions are:

- (1) Would the AFL, who have full control of all rosters and venues in all states, then refuse to play half of the games in the north of the state, which would result in all games being played in Hobart?
- (2) If that is the case, why would the Government commit to spending large amounts of funds upgrading the UTAS Stadium in Launceston?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the honourable member for her questions.

- (1) The position of the Government has been absolutely clear. The expectation is that games would be played in both northern and southern Tasmania. The AFL is cognisant of the population distribution throughout Tasmania and is aware of the Government's position on this matter.
- (2) Tasmania's stadiums play an important role in supporting the delivery of a range of cultural activities by way of hosting sport and entertainment events. Importantly, they contribute to driving significant economic activity and provide equity and access opportunities for those who cannot travel to comparative events interstate. Given the important role our stadiums play, in particular UTAS Stadium, it is critical that ongoing investment in maintenance and development occurs to ensure that facilities meet contemporary competition standards and quality consumer experiences are provided at modern, fit-for-purpose stadiums.

## **Health Sector Staffing**

### **Ms LOVELL question to DEPUTY LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms PALMER**

[2.44 p.m.]

Mr President, the Government announced in 2021 that they would employ an additional 180 full-time equivalent staff across the health system to deliver its elective surgery lists.

- (1) How many of these positions have been created and are currently filled?
- (2) In which regions have these positions been created, by FTE and head count?
- (3) What is the breakdown of positions by role, for example, nurses, doctors, allied health, support staff or other?
- (4) How many of the extra 8300 surgeries committed to have been completed?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the honourable member for her questions.

- (1),(3) In order to facilitate the expansion of elective surgery, resources are being increased right across our hospital system to improve capacity. This is important due to the interconnected nature of the health system.

Since July 2021, the hospital workforce grew by just over 260 FTE, including approximately 87 FTE in additional nurses and midwives; 21 FTE in additional salaried medical practitioners; 50 FTE in additional allied health professionals; 53 FTE of health service officers, hospital aides, allied health assistants, food service staff, orderlies and cleaners; 51 FTE of administrative and clerical staff.

This figure relates to THS hospital FTE growth only and does not represent total FTE growth of health staff outside of hospitals, including but not limited to ambulance and vaccination workforce. This includes staffing to directly support the Government's elective surgery program as identified in the Statewide Elective Surgery Four-Year Plan 2021-25, released on 17 August 2021. Staff have been employed to open Ward 3D at the Launceston General Hospital, action 1.2 in the plan.

Staff have been employed to expand capacity of the short stay surgical unit at the Launceston General Hospital, action 1.3 in the plan. Staff have been employed to increase medical bed capacity at the North West Regional Hospital, action 1.11 in the plan. Staff have been employed to increase to 23 general medical beds on Ward 2A at the Royal Hobart Hospital, action 1.20 in the plan. Staff have been employed to open the new trauma and acute surgical unit at the Royal Hobart Hospital, action 1.21 in the plan.

- (2) FTE creation in hospitals, I have the breakdown by region. In the south, 103 FTE, in the north, 93 FTE and for the north-west 64 FTE.
- (4) There has been an increase in the number of patients admitted for elective surgery to the end of January 2022 compared to the same period last financial year. As at the end of January 2022, 11 337 surgeries have been provided in total. This includes an estimated 2897 that are directly attributable to the additional funding provided. These additional surgeries are being completed during a period impacted by COVID-19, including summer, which is historically a time when fewer elective surgeries occur due to the holiday period. A higher volume of surgery is typically planned for and completed during the February-June period and that is also expected to be the case this year. Importantly, the Tasmanian Government is on track to complete approximately 30 000 extra elective surgeries and endoscopies over the next four years, so that we have a sustainable elective surgery list and more Tasmanians get their surgery within clinically recommended times.

### **Education Infrastructure Priority List**

**Mr WILLIE question to DEPUTY LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, Ms PALMER**

[2.49 p.m.]

Mr President, I have a pretty simple question that has not been answered. I sent it on Sunday and just by way of background, I know the former education minister, the honourable Jeremy Rockliff, used to be able to produce this in budget Estimates. People on committee B would know that he produced it straight away. I do not know what the hold-up is. Can the

state Government please provide the current Department of Education infrastructure priority list?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for that question.

I do apologise. I do not have an answer to that question at the moment but we are certainly doing everything we can to get that for you as soon as possible.

## **MOTION**

### **Note - Premier's Address**

#### **Resumed from above.**

[2.50 p.m.]

**Ms ARMITAGE** (Launceston) - Mr President, when I finished before lunch, I was speaking about the two colleges in Launceston. My thoughts are that perhaps it would be worthwhile for the Government to consider one college with two campuses.

To go on further, this is not to say that apprenticeships and traineeships should be neglected. The Tasmanian economy and the businesses and organisations that rely on skilled employees should be listened to when it comes to education policy. Businesses in my electorate, including Karen Burbury's Cataract on Paterson or Steve Simeoni's Tas City Building, for example, put a great deal of personal and professional investment into their staff. This sets people up for a very bright career indeed.

Skilled professionals and tradespeople in many cases go on to earn a lot of money through their careers. Small to medium businesses that provide pathways for their employees should be fostered and supported as much as possible. I have heard several doctors say you will not get a plumber out at two in the morning - and you would hate to get the charge - whereas a doctor is more likely to come out and not get nearly as much money. It is certainly worth going into some trades.

While our children are at school, in the meantime I am pleased to see that support extends beyond the school hours and days and into their family and community lives. I understand that six new child and family learning centres are being built and more upgrades to our schools are being funded. I also understand that this year the Government is increasing its support for students impacted by trauma in addition to the funding of the educational adjustments model for students with a disability.

I was shocked recently to hear the numbers of Tasmanian students suspended for physically abusing other students during 2021, which I understand was a marked increase on previous years. The disclosed state statistics tallied just under 8500 Tasmanian suspension incidents in 2021, up from 6830 in the previous year, with 2200 of those incidents resulting from physical abuse of another student. Those incidents of student-on-student violence led to 1511 students being suspended in 2021 compared to 1275 students suspended in 2020. This

also coincides with a rise in suspension incidents relating to student-on-staff violence, which increased from 268 in 2020 to 312 in 2021.

This is entirely unacceptable. No student, teacher, or support staff member should be going to school or work with the possibility of being physically abused. As I believe the shadow spokesperson for education, the member for Elwick, has pointed out, more support staff in schools, particularly for mental health intervention, would be a good start.

**Mr Willie** - The minister responded to the suspension rates saying it was a good thing, which I think shows a complete lack of understanding of the portfolio.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Yes. Raising reporting standards would of course also be of great assistance. We cannot formulate a solution to problems like these if we do not have evidence of their existence. Moreover, Kristen Desmond, founder of the Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby, has questioned how many of these suspensions are students with a disability or students impacted by trauma. How many were victims? Support for our more vulnerable children and the collection of data that can help demonstrate the scale of the problem would also help to direct good policy to protect, intervene when things go wrong and guide them through a more positive, productive education journey.

This is what I mean when I say I want all Tasmanians to be benefitting from the prosperous position we find ourselves in. Our unemployment rate is at 3.8 per cent according to the Premier's Address. Job vacancies are 72.6 per cent higher than before the pandemic. We are in such an extraordinarily advantageous position economically and financially, and we need to make sure we are extending these windfalls right across our communities.

In the state's northern capital, my electorate of Launceston has continued to flourish. As I have mentioned on many occasions, I believe Launceston would be the state's capital if we had a decent river. You are just fortunate that the Derwent is a little cleaner than the Tamar. If we could get rid of the mud I am sure we would become the capital.

We recently celebrated business success at the Launceston Chamber of Commerce and Business Excellence Awards. If you are looking for evidence that our northern commercial scene is in good shape, you need to look no further than to some of the amazing businesses, organisations and individuals whose successes were celebrated last Saturday. As mentioned, unfortunately I could not attend due to being in quarantine. However, I would like to acknowledge some of the fabulous winners of the Business Excellence Awards.

Harvest Launceston Community Farmers' Market celebrated their tenth birthday this year and they were awarded Environmental Excellence. It is a great little market that is on every Saturday. I am sure the member for Windermere and the member for Rosevears would be frequent visitors. We attend every Saturday to get our sourdough brought on by the member for Hobart, who encourages us to eat sourdough. Thank you.

**Mr Valentine** - That is fine. It works for me.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - It is a great harvest market.

Casalinga Gourmet Meats for Excellence in Agribusiness. This is another local butcher. It is wonderful to have butchers that are still working and going really well. Casalinga, on the

corner between Charles and Elizabeth Street, is a great little butcher and comes highly recommended.

Enable Ag for Excellence in a Start-up. Launceston City Mission, Mission Health for Community Service. Geronimo Aperitivo Bar and Restaurant for Hospitality run by Jeremy Kode, another young guy who has started up his own business, his own restaurant. Obviously in difficult times, but going very well and it is great to see him being awarded business excellence awards.

Commercial Dive Academy for Export. Healthy Tasmania for Health. Miss B's Student Services for Innovation and Technology. Emerson Health for Exceptional Workplaces. Launceston Precision Jewellers for Manufacturing. Property Wise Launceston for Marketing. North Festival for Exceptional Event. The Royal Flying Doctor Service for Professional Services Excellence. Find your Feet Australia for Retail, another new business. It opened up in the Kingsway. And the Overland Track Transport for Exceptional Visitor Experience. How good is it that people from Launceston - I believe Hobart would have the same, but from Launceston can actually get a bus up to Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair? They have daily services.

**Ms Rattray** - Was that your special interest speech on Tuesday? Did we already know that?

**Ms ARMITAGE** - You possibly did, but this is my state of the state contribution so I decided to give them a second bite of the cherry. They are such great businesses and worth more recognition, member for McIntyre.

**Ms Rattray** - I just thought, I think I've heard it. But say it again, that is fine.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - As mentioned, these organisations have proved themselves to demonstrate and practise excellence based on the opinions of an independent panel of judges. I also acknowledge, and did so in my special interest speech, member for McIntyre, but I will again, some of the fabulous finalists including the Migrant Resource Centre, Paint the Town Red - and I do not know how many people here might have been to Paint the Town Red.

**Ms Rattray** - Is that the art and where you drink wine?

**Ms ARMITAGE** - It is the art and pottery. I must admit I went as a gift from my Western Australian family. Both Bruce and I did paintings that now take pride of place in our kitchen. It is a great little place to go and have fun and very well attended by many people, not just from Launceston.

Tasmanian Hand Sanitiser - we know how well they have been doing. The Elphin Motel and Serviced Apartments. The Metz. Theatre North. Property Wise. Key2. Definium Technologies. And who can forget Encore Theatre with the wonderful shows that they have had? They just had *Chicago*, which fortunately, I went to see on the Saturday night before I went into quarantine on the Monday. So, I was very pleased to see *Chicago* by Encore Theatre. They are the most fabulous theatre company that put on the best shows in northern Tasmania.

The University of Tasmania Library at the Inveresk precinct in the member for Windermere's electorate was another wonderful milestone of the ongoing implementation of the UTAS Northern Transformation project. Everyone in and around Launceston benefits from that. It was wonderful to find out that anyone can go to the university library. That was really good news. There is a café there so it is not just for the university. People can go in, get a free library card, grab themselves a coffee and have a look around. That is a really good thing, close to the city. I was very pleased to attend and it was great to see that the community can use it.

The State of the City report released by the City of Launceston in February details a number of measures which have been locally taken to boost jobs and opportunities in Launceston. I will share a few of the milestones that can be taken from that. A total of \$800 000 in community care and recovery package grants were distributed to 196 Launceston-based businesses and organisations, resulting in an estimated \$1.3 million in economic activity. A further \$158 000 of events sponsorships funding was distributed and we are now really seeing our northern-based events and functions start to take off again in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding retail and occupancy rates in Launceston, the State of City report has this to say:

The number of ground floor shops open for business in Launceston's CBD has rapidly improved in the wake of disruptions caused by COVID-19 last year.

At the height of last year's lockdown, Council data shows that the number of dormant ground floor shops rose to 154 in the Launceston CBD.

Post lockdown, early data shows that Launceston's CBD has rebounded with only 57 dormant ground floor shops ... This equates to approximately 93% of ground floor commercial space being utilised and open for business.

Earlier in the year, I walked around some of the businesses in the Launceston CBD and was really quite shocked to hear about the blight of antisocial and even violent behaviour in our mall and in some of our stores. Almost every shop in the mall had stories about shop stealing, abuse, threatening behaviour and the difficulty they were having attracting customers back into their stores at a time where buying local is so important. In one store a lady was telling me that even though they did not have enough customers for two staff, it was important to have two staff because of the safety aspect, which was making their bottom line much more difficult.

After having a discussion with Commander Stuart Wilkinson and Inspector Nathan Johnson, I was really pleased that they are putting an accent on having more uniformed police in our CBD walking around to help with prevention rather than cure. Hopefully, the evidence of more uniformed police will make people think twice. It appears to be certain groups. There were not a lot of groups at this time when I was talking to the store holders; it was one particular group. Obviously, when that group moves on, another group moves in. It is an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed.

However, the workforce and key sectors, such as education, health care and retail are particularly affected by an ageing workforce and low population growth. This, I believe, should be a good impetus for the Government to focus on population attraction and growth policies outside the state's south.

I am hopeful, as ever, that we find solutions to geographical mobility in the state's north. That is to say that we should find more solutions to our traffic issues and transport options. It is pleasing to see that for the next five weeks, from 28 March, buses will be free. It is the hope that many people get into the habit of catching a bus. I do not remember the last time I caught a bus. I think I might hop on one outside and ride to work. I might get used to it. That is the whole aim, that people will get used to the bus and find out this really is not such a bad thing.

**Mr Willie** - That was a good idea.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - It is a good idea. If you look at the price of a car, if you catch a bus to and from work, plus the cost of parking, it could work quite well, particularly with the cost of fuel.

The trial of e-scooters is an interesting development. I am not sure if we will see it being a really viable alternative to driving or public transport. I did an opinion editorial on e-scooters last week and I was quite surprised at some of the information I discovered, particularly when I read the terms and conditions. I am sure that when most people get their app, they do not look at the terms and conditions. If you get on an orange Neuron scooter, you have to be 18 or over. How many know they have to be 18 or over to get on an orange Neuron scooter? I assume that if you do not meet the terms and conditions then the insurance would be void. With a purple Beam scooter, you can be 16 or under provided your parents say it is okay, but that does not meet the Traffic Act. If you go along with the requirements of the Beam scooter, you are breaking the Traffic Act.

I have mentioned the anomalies of the terms and conditions to the Launceston City Council because they had advised me in the past that they meet weekly with the scooter companies. I hope that they look at the anomalies in their terms and conditions and appreciate that, at the moment, particularly the purple scooters differ quite considerably to our Traffic Act.

Another thing I learnt about the scooters is the penalties. Now the police have not booked a lot of people, but I read in today's newspaper one lady was booked with being under the influence and a variety of other issues to do with that. I am not sure whether that was just convenience for the media, but it had a picture of an orange scooter going through the McDonalds Drive-Thru. It is in Today's Court in *The Examiner* so it is obviously on the public record.

The police have told me their aim really is on education. They are trying to educate people into what they should do on the scooters, as opposed to initially booking or charging them. It is \$129.75 for anyone riding without a helmet, using a mobile phone, two people on the scooter. There is a whole list of rules, but of course if you are riding under the influence of alcohol or drugs, then you go to court. The court will decide the penalty for riding under the influence.



I am sure a lot of people do not appreciate the fact there are as serious charges for just riding a scooter as there are for driving a car or anything else. It is not like a pushbike. There is certainly more concern with charges.

**Mr Valentine** - More exercise on a pushbike.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - There is more exercise and that was raised with me by a lady recently saying the scooters are obviously making us a more obese society because instead of people walking, they hop on a scooter and ride.

In my son's case, we probably live one kilometre from a supermarket. Because scooters are readily available near our house, he tells me he can get a scooter, reserve it for 15 minutes, he can go and ride back, where he used to walk to the supermarket. In his case, it is not as healthy as it was previously. Definitely more costly, when you consider \$1 to unlock and 45 cents a minute.

I have to say, I can imagine not wanting to put the helmets on their head necessarily, particularly with COVID-19 and you do not know who has used it last. I do not know whether you can buy those little hairnets you see when you go somewhere like Tassal or where we have been to some of those businesses, to put on your head under the helmet. Probably not so much COVID-19, but it would make you feel a little bit cleaner when you put that helmet on your head. I am not sure what might be in the helmets, but I can appreciate that some people are not keen to put the helmet on, but obviously it is part of the road rules and they need to do that.

I was also told by the City of Launceston General Manager that in the first month of the trial there were more than 60 000 e-scooter trips in Launceston, with rides travelling more than 100 000 kilometres. I do not know what it was in the second, it might have been a little bit more with the first being such a novelty, and that 40 jobs had been created through the companies involved in the trial.

The other issues are there is currently no by-law or road rule prohibiting the use of the personal mobility devices in our City Park, Riverbend Park, which is our children's playground, and Princes Square. Of course the companies have been asked that their scooters are geofenced and will not ride under power in those areas.

The other issue I have noticed down at the Seaport is the bridge that goes across and that plastic tread that you walk on has some really nasty grooves on it where apparently people lean scooters against the side rail and then they put them on full bore, spin the wheels and they have been melting the rubber on the trails, which is very unfortunate.

Obviously, it does not take many people to do the wrong thing and that is the really unfortunate part.

**Mr Valentine** - Kelly's Steps are the same and severely impacted.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - The same with the grooves and the melting.

**Mr Valentine** - The scooters have been dragged up them.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - There are always going to be unfortunate areas. Today, a lovely old gentleman in his 90s rang me about e-scooters. He keeps me advised with what is happening in the UK telling me in the UK a lot of places now have stopped the use of them because of the concern and the public liability. In New Zealand they had around \$5 million in public liability claims. It is good and bad. It will be interesting to see what happens at the end of the trial and how we go. Whether we continue it or bring in more restrictions, like Brisbane, about slowing them down more and having more devices on them to recognise pedestrians to try to make it safer for people.

**Mr Willie** - I think they are doing that here too. One of the companies is using a camera.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - The purple. Yes.

**Mr Willie** - Yes. To recognise pedestrians and others.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - You see them parked everywhere. Living in the city, I see them parked absolutely everywhere. People just stop them and you take a photo and the machine tells you that is fine, but the machine does not actually know whether you are blocking a footpath, across a footpath or whether it is at the edge. Some of the footpaths are very narrow and you have to feel for people, particularly in wheelchairs. It was in the paper recently where one gentleman fell over a scooter. He walks past our house regularly with his white stick as he is severely sight-impaired. For people like that it would be very difficult to have a scooter branching out and it is not easy to access and get around it, even people with prams and elderly people. As I said, it only takes a very small percentage to do the wrong thing. The majority can do the right thing and a lot of people love them and are very happy with them. I have heard from many people -

**Mr Willie** - It has given a lot of young people independence.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Yes. I wonder if they get a shock when they get their credit card bills at the end of the month. Living in the city, I also see people very late at night because outside our house, on the other side of the street, there are the metal grates and you hear when they go over them. You know when it is 1 o'clock in the morning and you hear this clang clang and think this person is probably had a little bit to drink. You hope they actually remember when they put the scooter away that they turn it off and finish it, otherwise I believe it keeps adding up the money. They might get an awful shock when they get their credit card bill. I wonder about some people using them continually because you are using it before you pay. You are paying later and when your credit card bill comes in, it is a bit like when your children start using your phone when we used to have the normal phones. All of a sudden you get your phone bill and see your children have been ringing friends on the mainland and the cost was quite high but you did not know until maybe a month later. I wonder if that might happen here.

**Mr Duigan** - My daughter had to walk back from her scooter, which was abandoned in town, because when your credit card reaches zero, the scooter stops.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Okay, so you have to have a debit card. You have to have a certain -

**Mr Duigan** - Yes, I guess that is a debit card situation.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - Right. That could be unfortunate if you are on your way to somewhere and you cannot get back.

**Ms Rattray** - I suggest the member's daughter needs a pay rise by the member.

**Mr Duigan** - Productivity rise.

**Ms ARMITAGE** - When my children were younger, I must admit it was the phone call to mum at two in the morning, 'Mum, can you pick me up please, I don't have any money for a cab.' Or, 'There aren't any cabs around.' It was interesting that there were always lots of cabs when I drove into town to pick them up, but they were not there when they phoned me. I think it was that paying of the money.

I am urging e-scooter riders and PMD users to do the right thing because it may then provide a transport option for the future. However, if we have lots of problems it will be much more difficult for the local councils to decide to continue them.

In conclusion, Tasmania finds itself in a unique position, especially considering the effects of the pandemic and the events which are unfolding overseas. I pay tribute to all Tasmanians and particularly those in the north of the state who have adapted so well and whose resilience epitomises the strong community spirit we find in places like Launceston.

I also thank all our responders, all our health workers, all our first responders for all the work they have done, particularly during the COVID-19 time; our police, our fire services. Sometimes I think we do not appreciate what they do. It has been said many times in this place, and the previous member for Windermere used to often say, 'They race in when we are racing out.' That is very true in many situations. I take the opportunity to thank those first responders and health workers for all the work they have done, particularly the extra work they have had to do during COVID-19. It cannot have been easy and I am sure it is not over yet.

I thank the Premier for delivering another state of the state Address. I am pleased we are in good financial shape. There are more things I want to know about some of the more recent policies which have been announced, because the Tasmanians who have worked hard and sacrificed much in the past two years deserve to share in the prosperity. I note the Premier's Address.

[3.15 p.m.]

**Mr GAFFNEY** (Mersey) - Mr President, I thank other members for their contributions and will listen to those remaining as well.

I rise today to make a few brief comments in response to the Premier's Address 2022 delivered in the other place earlier in March. As the Premier's speech commenced with an acknowledgement of the pandemic and its effects on all Tasmanians, I feel it is appropriate to take a moment to extend my personal thanks to all those in our state who have worked so hard to promote and deliver vaccinations, to the experts at Public Health who have provided guidance to the Government and advice and support to the public, including Tasmanian residents and visitors, and to the dedicated individuals employed in our frontline services.

Without a doubt the pandemic has affected all of us to varying degrees. I believe it is important to recognise the impact of the COVID-19 threat and its management on our

economy, government services, especially those involved in small businesses, where supply chains have been interrupted, health and safety measures have impacted on venue capacity and event surety and customers and clients have been less inclined to make non-essential visits to retail and hospitality businesses.

I welcome the Government's increasing support for students who may have been impacted by trauma, especially given the ongoing challenges that families are facing in light of COVID-19 and the increasing costs of maintaining a stable and secure family home. I note the recent announcement by the minister, Mr Ferguson, in relation to the bus fare subsidy, which would make bus travel free for the next five weeks. This is indeed welcome news for many road users and students in our state in easing the cost of living and potentially reducing the impact on the environment should commuters who previously travelled by car take up the opportunity to use community transport.

However, in the longer term, for many families, especially those in my electorate, it comes across as a weird game of chance. If your child's bus route happens to be across a notional urban boundary to get their child to school, it will trigger an additional cost that can be up to \$760 per year per child. For a family with more children at school, the cost to your family just multiplies. Members may recall my questions to the Leader, now some two-and-a-half years ago, on the technicalities of student transport and our subsequent briefing on this from Mr Ferguson.

I thank the Government for its response, as it has given us a little bit more clarity on what is a complex and seemingly arbitrary plethora of rules and regulations and the lottery for students on whether they have to pay to get to their local school or not. However, nothing has changed. Student transport costs the government about \$90 million per year, with a fare income from those who have to pay it, of about \$2 million. If fares for those routes that have them were ended, ticketing, administration and cash handling costs would go too. We would all see a net positive benefit to the Treasurer's bottom line with reduced overall contract costs, more timely services, reduced traffic congestion, together with an improved student attendance and retention.

It is time for the Government to revisit the fares amnesty from 2020. COVID-19 is an issue in our schools, our families are worried, our teachers are worried, we are worried, and case numbers in schools seem to be rising, especially in the north-west. A fares amnesty would allow students to rapidly board their school buses, with no need for interaction or contact with the driver and no need for cash handling or exchange of tickets. This would give the Government time to revisit the unfair urban boundary fare-triggering rule, whilst helping to keep our families safe in difficult times. With a new minister for Education, who happens also to be the Minister for State Growth, and who lives in the north-west, maybe the planets have now aligned with some genuine reform possible.

It is usual that the media, individuals and groups will be drawn to particular areas covered by the Premier's Address, and that certain topics receive much more airplay and public discourse than others. Likewise, it is only natural and a positive thing that members in this Council and those who serve in the other place will also focus on and examine thoroughly different aspects of the Address, whether that is because the statement directly relates to constituents in their electorate, or because of a particular interest in an industry or sector.

Perhaps the biggest announcement contained in the Premier's Address was the proposal for the new southern stadium at Regatta Point. The \$750 million project achieved the front page of the *Mercury*, as might be expected. It has also generated significant interest and public discourse, not all of it positive.

The member for Elwick mentioned the idea of a floating stadium. When I did play an odd game of football, you were either kicking with or against the wind. Now, you will be kicking with or against the tide.

As a member based in the north-west I am well aware of perceptions of city-centric spending in this state. More specifically, capital-centric spending. I will take a moment to read a short editorial from *The Advocate* newspaper on 3 March. It offers a viewpoint that may not have been shared previously. It reads:

Peter Gutwein's plan for a \$750 million stadium in Hobart has been labelled bold.

That is one word; there are others.

It's been billed as the final piece in the puzzle, the last box to be ticked, for Tasmania to get our own AFL team.

But the big problem, beside the eye-watering price tag, is that the team is meant to be for the entire state, not just the capital.

There is a strong expectation, which is very much part of the sales pitch, that the Tassie side will play home games in the North and in the South.

Currently, AFL games have 11 rostered home fixtures, not including the pre-season warm-ups and finals, and we are told a Tasmanian team would elect to have a five/six split between Launceston and Hobart, alternating each year.

So, we're talking about an investment of taxpayers' money that would rival the spend on the new *Spirits* in return for, maybe, six games a season.

It's clear why the government is wanting to present this as a multi-purpose stadium, and is talking up the prospect of other sporting and entertainment events being held at the venue, with its retractable roof.

We could count on the Hobart Hurricanes playing games at the new stadium, though they too commit to have at least some of their home fixtures in the North.

Others, however, are possibilities, not certainties, and we have seen it is often the case that more public funds are needed to secure such events. This is because Tasmania just does not have the population to make them safe commercial bets.

We are left with a business case, if one can call it that, for a stadium based on half a dozen games in each of the football and cricket seasons.

That's going to mean pressure will be applied for more of the so-called marquee games to be played in the South, and/or for a greater number of games overall.

The North, and by extension the NorthWest would lose out either way.

If not, then for the amount of usage it would see, at \$750 million, the stadium would hardly be a good investment.

Politically, promising funding to build it will not help with any seats, and may well cost the votes of those who believe the money would be better spent on hospitals.

That is the end of the quote.

Further to this, I note Dr Helen McArdle's comments recently on the radio echoing the words of many from my electorate that there is a huge need for health spending before something is built that will only be used by a few people a few times a year in Hobart.

I probably enjoy sports as much as the next person, possibly more than many Tasmanians who enjoy other pursuits. I do find it somewhat concerning and perplexing that the visual aspect and feel of our capital city for future generations actually rests in the hands of an AFL board and management subcommittee responsible for issuing AFL club licences. That is possibly a simplification of the situation. However, it must be noted that many Tasmanians do not regard infrastructure spending on sports facilities to be a priority.

The electorate of Mersey, although compact, has many things going for it. Devonport is the figurative gateway to Tasmania for many of our visitors. As such, the evolution of our port is vital not only to the tourism industry but for the hundreds of Tasmanian businesses that rely on efficient freight and logistics systems to get their goods to market, or to receive the components required for the manufacturing or retailing of operations. Mersey is home to some of the most innovative and enduring business success stories in the state, with a substantial number of people employed in Tasmanian companies in the electorate.

I and others were quite excited about the announcements regarding the *Spirit of Tasmania* vessels upgrade by the TT-Line and by the Premier. To think in the midst of all the pandemic interruptions, that the construction of *Spirit IV* remains on track is very positive news, if somewhat expected. I am keen to welcome the new ships in Devonport in 2023 and 2024 if they reach those deadlines. Indications from TT-Line are that *Spirit IV* and *Spirit V* will be more comfortable, have increased freight capacity and will continue to provide employment for many Tasmanians.

Some members may be aware of the recent maritime incident in the port of Devonport. On 28 January, a collision occurred between the commercial cement carrier *Goliath* and two stationary tug boats *Campbell Cove* and *York Cove*. The two tugs were destroyed and partially sunk. Thankfully, no one was injured from the incident. However, an immense effort was required to manage the resultant fuel and oil spills. In an interview with the ABC, the EPA State Pollution Control Officer, Mr Tony Port, said the quick use of booms had contained most of the oil and really minimised the impacts it had on the environment. I thank and sincerely congratulate the port workers, the EPA volunteers and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau,

for their efficient and diligent response to this incident which had not only a large financial cost but the potential to have a huge and irreversible impact on our waterways and the foreshore environment.

In 2020 I spoke in support of the establishment of a ministerial portfolio for climate change. I note the comments made by the Premier this year regarding renewable energy, the 2030 net zero target, the \$12.3 million hydrogen bus trial and aim of Tasmania becoming a carbon-neutral destination by 2025. These initiatives and targets are indeed welcome, but I reiterate the advice shared by the Tasmanian Climate Change Office with respect to a proposed economic transition from fossil fuels. There is definitely scope for more attention to this area. The Tasmanian Climate Change Office said:

First, start immediately. Postponing the phase out of fossil fuels just speeds up that rate of change needed, increasing both cost and degree of difficulty. Next, make equity a key objective, this needs to be a just transition aiming to protect those potentially disadvantaged by it. Thirdly, place the greatest requirements for action on the largest user of fossil fuels and government agencies and enterprises, the groups best resourced to start the transition. Finally, and importantly, it would be advisable to create a dedicated independent statutory authority and energy transition authority, whose job is to bring about a just transition; and when its work is done to disband. It is incumbent on all of us as community leaders and as individuals to do all we can to address the climate change challenge by making a genuine commitment to paying heed to the scientific evidence and projections at our disposal. By making what may be the hard decisions.

There have been some criticisms of the initiatives for home owners and landlords. While I believe there are valid arguments for both sides of that debate, my interest was especially piqued with the changes made to improve the accessibility of the HomeShare and Housing Market Entry Program. Reducing the deposit requirement to 2 per cent and increasing the income thresholds would have a huge impact on the number of Tasmanians who would now be eligible to utilise this program to get into their first home.

In the Mersey electorate, both the Devonport and the Latrobe municipalities have seen unprecedented growth in property prices and rents, as in most areas. Obviously, this situation of upwards pressure makes things very difficult for the young and families who are attempting to save a deposit to secure their first home. Not only is this a greater proportion of their disposable income allocated to rent, but the cost of securing a home has gone through the roof. Pardon the pun.

The Housing Market Entry Program stands to see many more Tasmanians becoming home owners much sooner. I note the increase of equity will mean up to 250 more purchases will be supported. I commend the Government for refining and improving this scheme and indeed the extent of the First Home Owner Grant. With the two programs, it appears the great Australian dream may be a reality for some who would otherwise struggle to achieve home ownership.

A reply to the Premier's Address by the member for Mersey would not be complete without reference to the Mersey Community Hospital. As the Premier and Health minister described, there has been an expanded investment, with a further \$20 million for a new kitchen

and new ward, which will increase the available beds at the MCH. Mersey is and always has been a political hot potato. In fact, I referred to that terminology in one of my earlier response speeches. However, the Mersey hospital appears to have well and truly secured its place in the Tasmanian health system, now and also into the future, as it should be.

Having been part of the Rural Health inquiry, I have been increasingly aware of the incredible work of the professionals in our hospitals and health facilities across the state. I am extremely keen to bend the ear of the Minister for Health on behalf of those hardworking people. In particular - I am probably at risk of labouring the point here - there is a need to promote and support pathways for our ENs, RNs and nurse practitioners to upskill and broaden their scopes of practice. We have a great pool of talent in our nursing professionals in Tasmania. I will continue to support innovative and commonsense policies which allow, for example, ENs to become qualified to administer medication, or for a palliative care EN to train and qualify as a PC, RN or - here it comes again, Mr President - to provide financial incentives and job security for registered nurses wishing to support our health system by training as nurse practitioners.

I am tired of hearing from all fronts that Tasmania is over 100 GPs short. We are and we have been for a long time and will continue to be so. I do not see this shortage being alleviated anytime soon. Perhaps we need to consider that more GPs, even if we could magic them up, might not be the answer. It is time to think outside the box. In fact, we know New Zealand has put \$50 million in the next five years to increase the number of nurse practitioners in that country because they have similar problems to those we have here.

It was at this time last year, the members in this place finalised the Tasmanian End-of-Life Choices (Voluntary Assisted Dying) Bill 2020, nearly 12 months ago. I congratulate all members of this place for their role and once again, have the opportunity to say we are the only House of Parliament in the world which has unanimously voted in favour of voluntary assisted dying legislation. Since the act received royal assent on 23 April and as we know, there is the 18-month legislated requirement, the Tasmanian VAD option will be available to Tasmanians from 23 October this year.

I felt that there was still a small role for me to play by keeping the community connected and informed and I tried to do so in a positive manner. I think it is very important, especially for Tasmanians and their families, to assure them that the VAD act will be available, it will be effective and accessible from 23 October this year. One of the advantages of me being connected with the Education department in my previous life is that voluntary assisted dying was an end-of-year topic for our year 11 and 12 high school certificate legal studies students. Last year, I presented a forum to my local college. Word got around and I was then invited to and ended up presenting 22 forums to 15 of our HSC colleges, government, private and Catholic schools in June, July and August of last year.

**Ms Rattray** - Well done, member.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - Thank you. The media was also interested and I was able to say I was undertaking community forums to help people understand the act and what was happening. I ended up doing another 26 community forums with a variety of community groups, Lions and Rotary Clubs, aged care homes and council-led forums. I was invited to be a keynote speaker at an environment conference because the theme was Changing the World Around Us, and at the ANF conference, a lawyers' conference in Hobart. I am even having another forum



next month for Huntingtons Tasmania. I also recently went on the front foot with Q&A fact sheets and it should be well known that the implementation task force, managed by Lisa Caswell the manager, has been doing a wonderful job. Indeed, other states are envious of how the task force and recently announced commission have been operating.

Whilst it is tempting to cover a laundry list of issues in the Premier's Address response, I promised to keep my comments brief. Therefore, I should wrap up with a bit of a plug for the electorate of Mersey.

Things are really happening on the coast. I encourage members to step outside the big cities, as it were, and come and see all the good things happening in Devonport.

**Ms Rattray** - I bought two pairs of shoes in Latrobe, only about a week ago.

**Mr GAFFNEY** - I heard about that. I got it firsthand and your mum was a delightful lady. The Foreshore Hotel is well underway, the redevelopment of Victoria Parade and the foreshore precinct is looking wonderful, and the new gallery within the Paranaple Centre area is providing a beautiful and well-attended space for local and visiting artists.

I am honoured to remain patron of the Devonport Orchid Society, the Mersey Community Care, Latrobe Basketball Association, the Devonport Poultry Club, Tasmanian Masters Games, the Devonport City Strikers and the Devonport Junior Soccer association. It has been incredibly pleasing to see the upgrades to infrastructure value-add to Meercroft Park. Given the rise of football - or soccer in the old language - in this state, it is great to see the facilities getting much-needed improvements and indeed, the needs of the growing female cohort met with new change rooms and showers. Similarly, the plans for the showground's redevelopment are progressing and I must congratulate the developers on their genuine commitment to community engagement and thoughtful negotiation throughout the process. Some of the members may not be aware, but the old racing track and showgrounds in Devonport have been sold and will be developed into a residential area. I was so impressed because the Devonport Poultry Club has been there for 111 years or even longer at that site and now has to relocate. The person in charge of that development actually came to their end-of-year Christmas function and brought their little 12-year-old boy because he is concerned about it. I felt that was a really good move from that person because he was putting people first and trying to make a connection and helping out.

**Ms Rattray** - Did they find a new home?

**Mr GAFFNEY** - They are looking at it. Yes, they are. I will now wind up. I will watch and listen with interest, as I am sure all members will, to see how the promises and projections shared by the Premier pan out over the next 12 months. I note the Premier's Address.

[3.35 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - Mr President, I welcome this opportunity to respond to the Premier's annual state of the state Address and thank other members for the contributions they have made, all of which have been really valuable and very interesting to listen to.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge that the Premier's speech contains some initiatives and commitments that will be welcomed by a range of Tasmanians. Some of these initiatives

were new while others were an update of processes already under way, as is appropriate for an annual update such as the formal Premier's Address to parliament.

The annual state of the state speech, otherwise known as the Premier's Address, is currently required by the parliamentary Standing Orders to be delivered within the first six sitting days of the parliamentary calendar year. This specific required time frame reflects that the key purpose of this annual address is agenda setting not only for spending initiatives, as the budget session provides for that, but for policy priorities and the proposed legislative agenda moving forward.

While the address delivered by the Premier on 4 March 2022 presents some declarations of intent and actions, overall the picture presented appears to be a rather selective series of highlighted issues rather than a comprehensive or holistic evaluation of the state's current status or a corresponding comprehensive plan moving forward. In fact, the Address provides more insight into the state of this Government and its priorities than it does into the state of Tasmania's capacity to house, feed and educate our community; for them to create, to work, and to play. There were also some significant absences and silences which warrant discussion.

To start with, I was struck by the almost non-presence of the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the Premier's Address; it barely casts a shadow there. This once-in-a-hundred-years global pandemic that sent a catastrophic shockwave cascading around the globe, that saw 'unprecedented' become one of the most overused words in our lexicon, is barely mentioned except in passing.

I have heard of invisible pandemics, but this disappearing act is truly remarkable. We know that COVID-19 has not disappeared. We know that well over 50 000 Tasmanians have contracted COVID-19, and likely thousands more who were either asymptomatic or perhaps did not get tested when ill. We know that the majority of the 12 years of age and younger cohort are not yet fully vaccinated. We know that Public Health experts are still unsure about the need or effectiveness of a fourth or even successive rounds of booster vaccinations. We know that many vulnerable Tasmanians, in particular those living with a disability, are very anxious about their health and safety as mask mandates have been lifted. We know the ramifications of long COVID-19 are yet to be fully understood. We also know that the state's Public Health Emergency Declaration was extended yet again under section 15 of the Public Health Act 1997 on 11 January this year for a further 12 weeks, which by my calculations takes us to around 5 April. Yet we do not know whether the Public Health Emergency Declaration will be extended again in April or not. Inexplicably, the important 'here is our plan' statement by the Premier - the state of the state Address - is silent on this matter.

It would be a fair assumption, given the increased emphasis on Tasmanians needing to transition to living with COVID-19, that the agenda setting plan for this year would include an update on the status of the emergency declaration and future plans. For example, what are the evidence-based threshold indicators necessary in order for the Public Health authorities to recommend the lifting of that emergency declaration?

Further, we do not know the evidence-based reasoning for the lifting of the mask mandate when a Public Health Emergency Declaration remains in place. There are many unknowns and unanswered questions regarding the Government's COVID-19 response, too many to list here and examine in detail.

Let me reiterate, if the worst of the pandemic is truly behind us, and of course we all hope that that is the case, then it would be a fair assumption for the Premier's significant address at the resumption of the parliamentary year to contain a comprehensive and detailed pandemic report and evaluation.

Ideally an agenda-setting state of the state Address would announce a public COVID-19 response evaluation process. It was not just the scale and health impact of the pandemic which catapulted it into the realm of the 'unprecedented'. Its duration of two years and counting was not foreseen by the Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangement, TEMA, nor the state Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy 2020-2025 which underpin those arrangements.

I have previously mentioned in this place that the emergency management system is based on the assumption that such emergencies would either be natural disasters or some form of hazard-sparked situation. The potential of pandemics being overly disruptive was not rated of high concern, as the documentation states the most likely candidate would be influenza, for which it regarded us to be well prepared. So, yes, the Government announced last year that we would review the Emergency Management Act 2006, but that is just one plank of our state emergency infrastructure, as I have mentioned. We need to forensically examine all arenas and tiers of governance, command structures and social and economic protection measures put in place over the last few years, particularly those measures which required many freedoms to be suspended temporarily.

What lessons have we learned? How can we be better prepared should we be confronted in the future by another seismic shock to our health, our economy and our freedoms? As members may recall, on 3 June 2020 this Chamber voted in support of a proposal for a joint House select committee to be established into Tasmania's COVID-19 response and recovery. Imagine the real-time data and lived experience such a committee would have collated by now and continued to add to, as is occurring in other states. One point of interest emphasised in the current Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements documents, under the heading Continual Improvement, is the following:

All sectors continuously learn and innovate to improve practices and share lessons, data and knowledge so that future emergency management is better and the overall cost of impact of emergencies and disasters is reduced. Continuous monitoring, review and evaluation should examine the processes, timelines and outcomes of plans. Review informs communities and displays transparency and accountability. Review also enables facilitation of the adaptive change process with communities.

That is from the *Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements*, Issue 1, 2019, page 19.

It describes a review that we are still waiting for. Instead, Tasmania's status report is presented as 'transitioning to living with COVID-19'. That transition is primarily described as a reopening, so not even a rebuilding, a re-imagining or a restoring, all of which are variations on a theme prevalent when we were at the height of the pandemic in 2020-21, which saw people discussing the Tasmania they wanted to emerge from the unprecedented pandemic experience.

At the time many of those re-emergence themes emphasised that with the challenges of the pandemic also came opportunities to re-evaluate, rethink and reposition our state as a

compassionate and equality-driven community. That community-focused transformative ethos does not appear to be reflected to the extent that I would like to see in the Premier's Address. I fear it appears that the pre-pandemic blinkers that previously obscured a clear focus on social health, education and social justice inequalities are being strapped back into place once more.

I am also prompted to reflect on the impact of COVID-19 on our democracy. In an op-ed piece I wrote that was published in the *Mercury* newspaper on 13 February this year, amongst other matters I asked, where is our:

Back to a safe, strong, parliament plan? Where is the guarantee that we have robust arrangements in place to maintain the business of democracy in the face of COVID-19?

I note that we are now seeing the regrettable impact of COVID-19 on our parliament and our democracy. Just this week we observed absences from our Chamber and from the other place. I note comments in the media today from the Government that seem to dismiss the import and consequence of these absences with implication that provision for the pairing of votes is sufficient to make up for the absence of members of both Chambers.

I strongly suggest that the absence of elected members of parliament - and I would say especially the absence of Independent members of parliament - has consequences for our democracy beyond the simple outcome of votes taken. I regard the suggestion that pairing arrangements on votes ameliorates the impact of that absence to be both ignorant and disrespectful. Every member of this parliament is here as an elected representative and voice for their community. Any impediment to the full participation of an elected member of parliament is a diminution of our democracy and its service to our community.

Case in point for our Chamber is the absence this week of the member for Murchison. At many points during the week, we have commented on the member's absence in our proceedings and noted the impact of that absence. To be clear, the contribution that is missing when an Independent member is prevented from participating is not just the end point of where their vote on a particular bill or amendment may have landed.

The contribution made by Independent members of this place to the scrutiny and review of legislation is substantial. It is in this contribution that considerable additional value is provided by this Chamber of review, as it is distinct from the contribution and already fixed positions of parties which have been prosecuted in the other place. The second reading contributions by members, including the questions raised for government response, are part of a complete parliamentary record on the passage of any bill. Similarly, the questions raised and the answers interrogated during the Committee stage of the passage of any bill add important detail and clarity to the parliamentary record.

This complete parliamentary record is important for the accountability of the government of the day. In fact, it can even have legal consequences if matters relating to a piece of legislation later become a matter before the courts. That is why it is a significant concern that for the past two years the Government has so sorely neglected to make appropriate arrangements for our parliament to function in the readily anticipated constraints that COVID-19 presents.

As the opening of our borders was planned for 15 December 2021 and we clearly knew that COVID-19 would re-enter our state, the Government prepared on many fronts through the second half of last year but made no provision for the full functioning of our parliament should members be impacted by COVID-19 isolation requirements. Why not, is my question. Other parliaments have done so. It is not an insurmountable ask if we place appropriate value on the full functioning of our democracy. It concerns me that the Government seems to have given it no regard whatsoever and so readily appears to brush aside the democratic consequences that we now see play out.

I have no doubt that the member for Murchison, as the member here so directly impacted this week, will have a view to share on this. I believe the Government owes the parliament and the Tasmanian community an explanation as to its neglect in being dutiful custodians of our democracy through its absence of proactive steps taken to ensure the full functioning of our parliament.

In previous contributions in this place I have raised the need for rigorous and consistent benchmarking indicators, facilitating meaningful and consistent measurement of progress, not just government activity. I have previously outlined other jurisdictions, such as New South Wales and New Zealand, who provide such frameworks of key indicator benchmarks, which are reported against consistently. I am not revisiting details here again in this contribution. I will reiterate that the incorporation of this form of more nuanced and reflective measurement mechanism would make successive state of the state addresses more robust, accountable and meaningful.

Over its lifetime, a government would be able to report against set indicators and demonstrate how its policies have, or have not, successfully delivered on specific targets. The lack of any meaningful reporting framework incorporated in the Premier's Address is surprising, given the fact that the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESCRAC) recommended the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (the STGs) which could readily provide such a framework. While the Government apparently accepted all PESRAC recommendations, I am not aware of any indication that this one is being progressed. There is certainly no sign of the STGs or any other accountable benchmarking framework for measuring progress in the state of the state Address that we are speaking about today. Once more, we are largely left a list of activity and spending commitments rather than an accountable report on outcomes.

I mentioned previously that the timing of each annual state of the state Address is stipulated for the beginning of each parliamentary calendar year. This timing is to facilitate not only an evaluation of previous actions, but also to lay out the government's plan for the year, which is why I find the absence of any detailed legislative agenda in this year's state of the state Address to be absolutely extraordinary. I re-read the transcript numerous times thinking I must have missed it, but no, the gap, the absence, is very real. It is notable that the Premier's speech emphasises financial and expenditure commitments and any enabling legislation for those I presume is to be assumed, or in large part they are processes which bypass parliament in the main.

One has to wonder then, about how and why any government would consider silence on a legislative agenda to be a good thing. Surely it opens up the government to criticism that it either does not have a work plan or it is struggling to deliver it for whatever reason. It may also raise concerns that the Government is deliberately avoiding forewarning the community

of potentially controversial or divisive legislative plans and instead will possibly drop bills into the parliament at short notice. Or perhaps it indicates an arrogance that it just has not occurred to the Government that there is a fair expectation on behalf of both the electorate and the non-government members of our parliament that the intended legislative focus and priorities should be publicly outlined in a timely manner to encourage engagement and involvement in the decision-making processes that surround it.

One matter that I will continue to champion at every opportunity as a priority legislative reform for our state is the establishment of a human rights act. While we will not be at the front of the pack on this, noting that Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory all have some form of human rights legislation, it would be a significant shame for Tasmania to lag behind and find ourselves, yet again, trailing the pack to the detriment of the citizens of our state. We have already explicitly acknowledged human rights as a foundation in some pieces of legislation in this state. An example would be the Education Act 2016, which explicitly references rights of children. I believe it is inevitable that we will move towards a legislative instrument that recognises and protects our fundamental human rights and becomes a mechanism by which we assess and hold accountable government policy and budgetary decisions. I look forward to that day coming.

Speaking of a legislative agenda, one glaring absence in this Premier's Address was an update on the state of our long-promised and long-overdue political donations and disclosures reform. I note the member for Hobart has discussed this in his contribution. Given Tasmania's recent controversial history and disquiet over the perceived influence of political donors, plus our continual embarrassment on the national stage for having the worst and the weakest political donation disclosure system, it beggars belief that any government claiming to be in touch with the public would fail to even have the courtesy of providing an update in this foundational parliamentary address for the coming year.

To recap for members, following the community outrage and anger over the blatant intrusion of gambling-vested-interest dollars during the March 2018 state election, the then premier, Will Hodgman, promised political donation disclosure reform in May of that year, 2018. Four years, and another election later we are still waiting. Eventually, the exposure draft of the Electoral Disclosure and Funding Bill 2021 was released for public consultation in August last year with a submission period closing late September.

Despite the Justice department website currently stating that unless specified as confidential, all submissions will be released publicly in accordance with the publication of submissions received by Tasmanian government departments in response to consultations on major policy issues, submissions received on that draft bill have yet to be made publicly available. And I note quite a few others which have been consulted on in times even more distant.

It was inexcusable for the Government to not have this reform in place prior to last year's state election. It remains inexcusable for it to be languishing on the bottom of the pile, it would appear, of government priorities. Not only do Tasmanians deserve a formal update on the proposed time frame by which to expect to see this long-overdue legislative reform, they also deserve reassurance that any eventual bill will reflect community expectation for the most rigorous and transparent regime possible. It must include genuine, real-time disclosures and an aggregate disclosure threshold of no more than \$1000, as is the case in a majority of interstate jurisdictions.

On this matter, the Australian Electoral Commission released the latest available political donations data in February, just last month. With no disclosure threshold of our own in this state, currently, we default to the Commonwealth threshold of \$14 300. Far in excess of the disclosure threshold in any other state in our nation.

The data released last month, in February, showed the Tasmanian Liberals had an income of \$4.3 million in 2020-21, of which \$262 000 was disclosed. A mere 7.6 per cent. Interestingly, in other AEC reporting data, donors to the Tasmanian Liberals themselves disclosed a further \$395 578, which means an overall total of disclosures from both the party and the donors was \$657 578. That amounted to 19.22 per cent of the overall income. For just over 80 per cent or, specifically, \$2 763 304, we have no disclosure and no visibility when it comes to the money flowing into the Tasmanian Liberal Party.

If we turn to the Tasmanian Labor Party to see what was disclosed in the February data from the AEC, we find the Tasmanian Labor Party in the 2020-21 financial year had an income of \$1 170 441. That party disclosed the source of \$180 160 of that income. Other donors disclosed a further \$148 250. The overall origin of 28 per cent of the Tasmanian Labor Party's income was disclosed, leaving over 70 per cent with no disclosure and no visibility.

For completeness, I will detail the data on the Tasmanian branch of the Australian Greens released in the February AEC figures. The Tasmanian Greens had an income of \$877 047 in the 2020-21 financial year. Of that, \$219 613 or 25 per cent was disclosed in the AEC data. In addition to that, on their website, the Tasmanian Greens also disclosed seven individuals who had donated over the party's voluntary disclosure threshold of \$1500 in the 2020-21 financial year. Those seven donations amounted to a further \$66 459, meaning that in total the origin of 32 per cent of the Tasmanian Greens income was disclosed. We know that any donations contributing to the remaining 67 per cent were under the \$1500 voluntary disclosure threshold that they apply. That is a lot of numbers.

I want to make the point: there is no justifiable reason for this important reform we have had dangled before us for the past four years to be delayed any further and these numbers reinforce that fact. It is simply not good enough that the vast majority of the money flowing into the parties in this state is invisible to us in terms of its origin.

The Premier has made public comments that the bill will be introduced in the first half of this year and yet he has failed to make any mention in the state of the state Address. Certainly, it does not look to be anywhere in sight and the submissions on the draft bill made in September last year are nowhere to be seen on the Department of Justice website. We cannot even see and gauge community expectation in anticipation of that bill coming to us.

Madam Acting President, the Government has been stringing the Tasmanian public along on this matter for the past four years. It is well past time that a firm and specific date is set for the introduction of this reform bill to this parliament.

With the AEC data release in February, we certainly now know exactly how pointless, also, the promises of a voluntary donation disclosure were from the Gutwein Liberal Government in May last year.

I note there has been reporting on this on the *Tasmanian Inquirer* news site. Despite the commitment made by the Premier, Peter Gutwein, that his party would voluntarily make public

all donations over \$5000, the data released tells us that the Premier and his party failed to do that. A total of almost \$70 000 in donations above that threshold was made during the election campaign period and yet hidden from voters in the May 2021 election. Having promised Tasmanian voters when the election was called on 26 March 2021 that his party would voluntarily disclose all donations of more than \$5000 within two business days, the Premier, Peter Gutwein apparently failed to disclose on the party's websites six donations that exceeded that amount made during the campaign period. The news site that reported on this detailed those six donations. Those six undisclosed donations amounted to \$69 600. There were also another six donations, all for exactly \$5000 and therefore I suppose technically able to be regarded as just under the Liberals' expressed voluntary disclosure threshold for the election period of over \$5000.

Honoured though it was even during the campaign, as far as I am concerned, after the end of the campaign period the Liberal party and the Premier, Mr Gutwein were more than happy to drop their commitment of disclosure of donations above \$5000. I believe this is very telling. If it is good enough for an election campaign, why stop doing it? We know from the AEC data that between the May election and the end of the AEC's disclosure period 30 June 2021, a further \$24 000 in donations above \$5000 were made to the Tasmanian Liberal Party.

The intent of political donation disclosure is to provide transparency on where financial support to political parties is coming from. This is so the public can make assessments as to the extent of the influence any financial support may have on public policy and public investment. We would all recognise the potential to influence public policy and public investment through financial support to political parties and candidates is not just limited to campaign periods. It applies equally to political donations made throughout the year and throughout the election cycle. To suggest otherwise would be utter nonsense.

To finish on this matter, I also note the new incoming Premier of South Australia has his eye on donation reform in that state. He wants to ensure that the election in which he just came to power, and I quote:

... will be the last state election where private money plays any role.

He further stated on Twitter:

If we can do one thing to improve public confidence in our democratic institutions, it is this: ban all donations for elections. No more private money for political parties' campaigns. Not business money, not union money.

Hear hear, I say.

The proposal from the Premier, Mr Gutwein in the draft election donations reform bill we saw last year was to emulate South Australia's disclosure limit of \$5000. A figure our Premier described, having looked around the country apparently at all other states with lower limits, as being 'about right'. How interesting it will be once we finally do have a bill come to us for Tasmania to contemplate pegging ourselves to the level of a particular state, South Australia, whose current political leadership is disavowing the appropriateness of that self-same level of disclosure. There is plenty of further discussion to be had on this topic I believe.

If there was to be an honest state of the state evaluation of Tasmania's democratic system of governance and probity, I fear we may not score highly. Additional to the need for a



rigorous state-based political donation disclosure regime, another significant issue raised by many as fundamental to the health of our democracy is the need to restore the numbers of the Assembly. I acknowledge the member for Hobart spoke about this in his contribution.

**Mr Valentine** - I did not read your notes, all right?

**Ms WEBB** - No, that is all right. No collaboration or correspondence were entered into. I appreciate the convention not to reflect on the activity of the other place and further that on matters of MP numbers I understand there is an informal agreement to let each Chamber decide for itself its makeup. I do note the precedent of former president, the honourable Sue Smith MLC, who made a point of stating during her valedictory speech in this place on 18 April 2013, that despite voting for the 1998 cuts to MP numbers, she came to consider the cuts to the Assembly to be a mistake. I know some members here now were also here when Ms Smith made those comments in her valedictory speech. You would no doubt be aware one of the reasons given by Ms Smith for the change in her position was her observation of how the reduced number of Assembly MPs had negatively impacted upon the capacity of the parliament's committee system to function efficiently and effectively. The member for Hobart spoke to this point also.

Given the Premier stated, during the Assembly budget Estimate scrutiny hearings last year, that in principle he agreed the Assembly is too small, combined with his many assertions that our state economy is a strong one and one of the best national performers, then maybe it is time that a similar investment is made for the health of our democracy and parliament by restoring the lower House numbers to ensure Tasmanian parliamentary democracy is strong, capable of being one of the best national performers also.

The global pandemic has certainly reminded us that all life is vulnerable and a fragile thing. I must say current global events, when we look to Ukraine, are now reminding us that so too is democracy at times a fragile and vulnerable thing. We need to not take our precious democracy for granted, but rather we must actively invest in it to ensure it is robust.

The Premier's Address did include an important update on progress towards developing an agreed truth-telling and treaty process with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I reiterate my former statement supporting efforts towards a genuine treaty process. I am heartened to see recognised that the parliament should be kept informed on developments. Of course this is not going to be an easy or straightforward process. It will be difficult and at times it may be confrontational, but it does need to occur.

As the Premier's Address states unequivocally, whatever the processes that eventuate, they must be co-authored by and with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Clearly listening to truth-telling is going to be as important as the telling. Listening is fundamental to this exercise. Undoubtedly neither the telling nor the listening will be easy. A key part of the listening will be the recognition of responsibility via a range of institutions representing the state, including the institution of parliament, which is why it jarred a little last year when the Pathway to Truth-Telling and Treaty report by Professor Kate Warner, Professor Tim McCormack and Ms Fauve Kurnadi was tabled in parliament on an extremely busy final parliamentary sitting day. Ideally, I would have thought a report of this significance would have been provided with the gravitas of a formal response via parliamentary debate. Something of this significance also warrants hearing more directly from the affected community.

Members here may be aware of the significant precedent set on 13 August 1997, when the House of Assembly unanimously passed a motion moved by the then premier, Tony Rundle, apologising for the trauma of the Stolen Generation. What was so extraordinary about that debate was that a representative of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, Ms Annette Peardon, was invited to address the parliament directly from the bar in the Assembly. Now, it may be that it is not considered an appropriate or an even desirable option to undertake a similar process, which would be a representative of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community address parliament directly in this instance at this point in time. However, it is worth placing on the public record that we are aware of that earlier precedent. Hopefully, in that spirit of co-authorship endorsed by the Premier in his speech, an appropriate mechanism will be found and identified ideally by the community itself that would bring forward that voice to parliament and tell us their truth directly, rather than just via a tabled report. In the meantime though, I certainly wish all the very best to those involved in progressing this very important process and piece of work, and reiterate my support for it.

It is always informative to give some attention and notice to the language that is used in public communications and political communications. Choices of language can indicate the values base and the priorities of the speaker. I was interested to note some of the language used in this year's state of the state Address and to reflect on that in light of previous years.

Two years ago, the Premier, Mr Gutwein, in his first state of the state, very soon after his ascension to the role of Premier, made a commitment that his would be a government of compassion. That was a prominent message, readily seen as appropriate for the time, as COVID-19 loomed on our doorstep. I said then in my reply to the Premier's Address in 2020:

I believe that acts of compassion build trust and a government that acts with genuine compassion in words and in behaviours and decisions will garner the trust of the community.

We have certainly needed all the trust in government that we could muster these past two years. I believe that we still do, given that we are still in the midst of navigating our way through and managing the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given that, I note that there is a distinctive change in language in this year's Premier's Address. I did not hear messages of compassion come through strongly. What I heard most strongly were messages centred on aspiration and confidence. Others in their contributions here have picked up on this language used and noted it also, which I think confirms for me that it was likely the intended takeaway narrative from the Premier's Address.

For many Tasmanians, that narrative will resonate. For some in our community, that narrative will accurately reflect their own lives, their values and their priorities. I certainly accept that there is a positive place for aspiration and its focus on achieving material progress and success. However, I cannot help but also reflect that many other Tasmanians will feel a disconnect with the tenor of the language and narrative of aspiration and confidence, and may look in vain to see themselves represented in it. Almost as an afterthought or footnote, there is a mention in the closing stages of the Premier's Address of the need to:

Create opportunities for Tasmanians, regardless of their background or circumstance.

This is virtually the sole acknowledgement that we are battling structural social inequalities, some that have been ingrained over generations and some reflecting recent shifts of our social tectonic plates, if you will.

Structural inequalities in our state have long been lamented as creating what is often called 'two Tasmanias'. What we know without a doubt is that while some Tasmanians may have a 'quiet confidence' to use the Premier's term, there are far too many Tasmanians living with a 'quiet desperation'. Here I think of the quiet desperation of those struggling to find an affordable home for their family; the quiet desperation of those who have retreated to home isolation as Public Health measures have been lifted and their disabilities or vulnerabilities are putting them at higher risk in the face of others relishing their freedoms. I think also of potentially the quiet desperation for some of those who have been and continue to be at the forefront of health and social care during COVID-19 and who have borne the brunt of supporting and caring for our community with little to compensate for the personal burden they have carried on our behalf.

Put simply, reflecting on the language used and the narrative created in this year's Premier's Address, I note that unlike the Address of two years ago in 2020, which could be seen to speak to all Tasmanians in that message of compassion, I fear that in this year's Address we have seen a return to a government that speaks primarily to only one of the two Tasmanias.

A major announcement in the Premier's Address was the disbanding of the Department of Communities Tasmania, which the Premier described as:

moving from a siloed government approach, in order to lift capabilities across systems, policies, processes and procedures.

This is quite puzzling as the Department of Communities Tasmania has only been in existence, I believe, since 2016. It was created by this same Liberal Government specifically to, wait for it, 'break down silos and align government services that had natural connections'. Fascinating that we can have the same rationale provided to create a new department and then within a few short years disband that self-same department.

What comes to my mind are questions. In what ways did the Department of Communities Tasmania experiment fail? Which structural aspects of the departmental responsibilities and activities proved themselves to be ineffective? What exactly was being monitored and measured to assess how successfully the Department of Communities Tasmania was meeting its intended outcomes? Are we to presume that it was in the monitoring and measurement of specific aspects of the functioning of the Department of Communities Tasmania that indicated a failure of such catastrophic proportions that the disbandment of the whole department was warranted? How are we to know? We are yet to have a clear and comprehensive explanation from the Premier or the Government as to exactly what problem the Government is proposing to solve with their decision and what measurable improvements in outcomes or specific increase in capabilities it will deliver.

Creating or breaking apart a government department is no small thing. It is a complex and costly undertaking. It can be incredibly disruptive to services and cause considerable uncertainty for staff and for government-funded programs and services in the community sector. The abruptness of this announcement prompts me to question the true purpose of the

decision. Where is the evidence base for making these changes? The Premier has certainly not presented us with any.

What indication do we have that it will improve outcomes for the Tasmanian people and communities, especially given that it relates to services that provide support to some of our most vulnerable community members? Given that vulnerability, what evidence do we have that this decision will not serve to create perverse outcomes or unintended consequences, especially if it is a decision that was taken in haste and also looks to be planned to be implemented in haste?

The very least we can certainly say is that it came out of the blue. We had the Watt review of the State Service delivered last year. While I believe the Premier tried to link this dramatic axing of a government department to that report, I do not believe anything of this sort was recommended in the Watt review. The two most discussed elements of this breaking up of Communities Tasmania are two very fundamental changes: the transformation of Housing Tasmania into a statutory authority and the shifting of Children and Youth Services into the Education Department. Many questions arise and I will talk through some of them.

I note, interestingly, commentary from HACSU on this decision to disband the Department of Communities Tasmania which points to a similar departmental shift that occurred in South Australia in 2012, where the South Australian department of family services was combined with the Department of Education in that state. A couple of years and a royal commission later, South Australia reversed that decision when it was identified, I understand, that the department with the business of child protection as its focus did not belong in the Department of Education. Now, every state has its own circumstances, but we do look to other jurisdictions and seek to learn from them.

It is not clear to me that this decision to bring our child safety and family support services into the Department of Education is well indicated or backed by expert evidence or experience. I am fully prepared to be made aware of otherwise, but it has not been presented to us thus far. Quite frankly, the only problem that I can readily see that this move may be designed to solve is a political one for the Government.

We currently have a commission of inquiry in progress, which, when it reports, is likely to have some significant, if not damning, findings and recommendations in relation to children and family services and youth justice in this state. What better way, I cannot help but think, to have an immediate deflection of any of those findings or recommendations than by having already restructured those particular areas in advance of the anticipated criticism. This unseemly rush, is what it looks like, to pre-empt criticism is a significant missed opportunity. I think it sells our state short on gaining full benefit and full healing from a commission of inquiry process.

This Government could instead have had the courage to wait for that commission of inquiry to play out, to hear and understand the findings and recommendations that it makes and then carefully and consultatively seek to make changes and improvements informed by that important process. Our state is to be deprived of that opportunity. We appear to be rushing into a major restructure of key departments related to that commission of inquiry without a clear motive for doing so, without a credible evidence base to guide us and without any articulated improvement of outcomes by which the Government could be held to account for its decision.

Perhaps this Government - or at least, key members of its executive - do not expect to be here to pick up the pieces three, four, five years down the track once the dust settles and we see the impact of this hasty restructure. As part of the disappearance of the Department of Communities Tasmania, the decision to take Housing Tasmania out of a government department and transform it into a statutory authority is worth examining. It will be a costly and complex process to some extent, yet another skills-based board and bureaucratic framework to create, and it will involve the removal of responsibility and accountability from the minister, putting it at arm's length instead, where any political heat will be felt much more mildly by executive government.

The proposal is to align the new authority with Infrastructure and Transport and State Growth, but we know the remit of the current Housing Tasmania covers much more than just building things. The planning, provision and management of public and social housing is not just property development. It is community building and shaping. It is social services to support individuals and families in their capacity to access a safe and secure home. Housing Tasmania, as it is now, covers the planning, funding and oversight of the full suite of Housing Connect services, including homelessness services and rental supports, as well as public and social housing provision and management and policy planning.

Currently, it is embedded in the community sector and intrinsically connected with a range of other social and health services where it is located in the Department of Communities Tasmania. We have to ask ourselves, what happens to these connections and the provision of that integrated effective service when Housing Tasmania is taken out of a department focused on communities and reconfigured as a statutory authority situated in a department focused on infrastructure, and with the undoubted primacy that gives to property development as a standalone activity? Will the full spread of the current Housing Tasmania responsibilities and the skills, experience and accountabilities required to plan and administer them be successfully undertaken by an independent statutory authority under a skills-based board? It will be very interesting to see the proposed skill mix of that board.

The Government's commitment to substantial additional public and social housing development over the next decade is a very welcome announcement. It is significant and, if it comes to pass as planned, it will make a difference over time to the situation that we currently find ourselves in. We would also need the federal government to step up and make similar commitments to funding an increase in the supply of social and public housing to complement that and to really put us ahead of the game, rather than just playing catch-up. This Government's commitment - although very laudable - will still only see us do that for quite some time yet.

While those future commitments are welcome and needed, we are left with a question: what will alleviate the urgent crisis now? Infrastructure Australia's report, *Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps* identifies Tasmania's major infrastructure gaps as the availability, diversity and affordability of housing, noting that Hobart is the least affordable capital city in Australia. With our 0.3 per cent vacancy rate in Hobart in January, which is apparently half what it was at the same time last year, we have gone light years beyond a market failure in our private rental market under this Government, which begs the question, why would a government not be taking every available opportunity to redress this catastrophic failure? I think it is plain to see that this Government's ideology stands in the way of some of the measures that would immediately improve the housing situation in the rental market of

vulnerable Tasmanians. This Government has available to it numerous other policy levers right now that could provide more immediate alleviation.

The thing that prevents this Government from pulling those levers appears to be outright ideology and the prioritisation of those who would have more over those who may have least. Interestingly, in the urgency of the pandemic, we saw that conservative state and federal governments were willing and able to set aside ideology and make policy decisions that would otherwise be distasteful to them. They did this because it was an emergency. They knew such measures were urgently needed for the health and wellbeing of the community. They did it because despite their ideological objections, they knew those measures would work. Here I am thinking of things like, the increase in welfare support to liveable levels, the evictions protections put in place and other forms of economic stimulus rolled out.

It is interesting to contemplate where the line for that kind of response is drawn. When is it enough of an emergency to set ideology aside and do what is needed, and what will work? Is it, as the pandemic appeared to demonstrate, that action is only taken when the emergency starts to hurt those people who are the usual beneficiaries of government policies? Then, when the crisis is deemed to have sufficiently subsided, is it back to ideology, back to policy that prioritises what can only be regarded as the needs of the haves over those of the have-nots?

We see that return to ideology-driven form in the recently promised land tax cuts and the utter nonsense suggestion that this will put downward pressure on rents. This attempt to frame an outright gift to owners of multiple properties as some form of positive for those desperate and homeless and unable to access private rentals is complete rubbish. Not only does that emperor have no clothes, he is dancing down the street doing puppetry with his privates as far as I am concerned. There is not one skerrick of evidence that reducing the cost to landlords will result in reductions in rents. Not one. I stand here saying that right now as someone who is both a landlord and a tenant. I challenge the Government to commit right now to independent monitoring of that land tax initiative and an assessment after 12 months of whether it had any impact at all on rents or rent increases.

I find the most distasteful aspect of this to be the dishonest narrative from the Government that it is doing all it can to address horrific damage being caused to Tasmanians by the catastrophic lack of accessible, affordable homes in this state. But for an ideology that prioritises the haves over the have-nots, why would we not seek to shore up our private rental market with targeted regulation for the short-term housing market to stem the bleeding of whole properties out of our long-term rentals and into the tourism accommodation market?

**Mr Valentine** - I think it is something that is actually going to be debated at the Hobart City Council on Monday night.

**Ms WEBB** - We could do more to support it from the state government and the state parliament level. But for an ideology that prioritises those wealthy enough to own property over those who do not, why would we not overtake the long-overdue and long-called for review of the Residential Tenancy Act to seek to provide contemporary and effective protections and security for vulnerable Tasmanians in private rental? But for an ideology that prioritises building the wealth of landlords over protecting tenants from homelessness, why would we not look to stabilise skyrocketing rents in this state through sensible regulation?

This one, as far as I am concerned, is an absolute no-brainer. It is large jumps in rent that have been an all-too-frequent factor driving Tasmanians out of what had been secure rentals into homelessness and onto our public housing waiting lists where they will currently wait for 71.5 weeks to get a home. With the only current limiting factor for rent increases under our current legislation being market equivalence, we are seeing a race to the top when it comes to rental increases in the state. Every member will have heard stories of this I am sure. For example, capping annual rent increases to CPI would stabilise rent increases for the short-to-medium term and act to prevent the fall of Tasmanians from being a secure renter into homelessness that we see all too often around us. There is no detriment to landlords in measures such as that. Their property will still rise in value. Their wealth will still build. They will still collect rent that has been sufficient to date and can increase to accommodate CPI increases.

Ireland, Scotland, Spain, and Canada are among some nations around the world that utilise a form of rent stabilisation to assist in very tight rental markets.

Australia itself has utilised this notably during the Second World War, when the Commonwealth itself fixed rents at 1940 levels. Independent tribunals then, for those who may not be aware, administered variations to the rate of rent through to 1948, at which point the states took it back over again, and in their own time, wound back those measures as required.

More recently, we had a version of rent control through the National Rental Affordability Scheme which successfully created thousands of affordable private rentals. Sadly, that scheme is now ending and members here may have been contacted as I have been by tenants in what were previously NRAS properties, who are imminently facing homelessness due to the scheme ending and their rents about to jump massively as a result.

Tragically, we certainly are not doing all we can to ensure all Tasmanians and especially those most vulnerable, are protected from homelessness and the disabling effect that has on all other aspects of one's life.

This Government is only countenancing measures that provide no disadvantage or indeed provide direct benefit, to those in the Tasmanian community that it appears to value most.

Under that approach we have seen some positive things. We have seen an extension to the HomeShare program. This is a positive measure to be sure. It provides no disadvantage to those ideologically supported by the Government and it will benefit some Tasmanians to secure a home.

We have also seen the doubling of the Private Rental Incentives Program. Again, a positive measure. No disadvantage and indeed, potentially a benefit to those typically ideologically supported by the government. Those are positive things.

But, if you are going to stick with these ideologically palatable initiatives and spurn those that have a whiff of placing the needs of a vulnerable tenant or homeless person above those of a property owner, why not at the very least then, devote a substantially greater investment to the palatable ones and why not provide a higher incentive to attract participation into them, so you at least double, triple, quadruple the effect they will have if they are the only palatable ones you are going to contemplate?

I will move on from housing-related matters and look at some other aspects of the proposed restructuring in the Department of Communities Tasmania. What we will see in that dismantlement is a shift of disability and community services from the Department of Communities Tasmania to Department of Premier and Cabinet.

What do the disability sector and Tasmanians with a disability think of this move? I do not know. I have not gone out to consult widely on it. Did the Government before it made the decision? Were the disability sector or Tasmanians with a disability who will be affected by this change consulted? At a time when we know many Tasmanians with a disability have felt disregarded and inadequately protected by the Government, in the COVID-19 reopening strategy for our state, have they also been ignored in the decision-making for this major shift of departmental responsibility? As a reminder to members here, it is the disability sector that has long asserted that very fundamental maxim of 'nothing about us, without us'. I wonder if that is what we saw here.

If we are proposing to dismantle Department of Communities Tasmania, another outcome would provide an ideal time to reassess the appropriate placement of the Gambling Support Program in this state.

Both the mental health and the alcohol and drug services are situated in the Health department. As gambling addiction and gambling disorders are diagnosable mental health conditions and could be seen as similar in the response and services required to substance-related addictions, it would be most appropriate for the Gambling Support Program and the associated services to be shifted to the Department of Health. Instead, I understand they are to be shifted to DPAC and yet again, we must be prompted to ask, what is the rationale for this move?

Along with every other element of the removal of the Department of Communities Tasmania, no rationale has been provided and no expected improvement of outcomes has been committed to in terms of situating the Gambling Support Program in DPAC. I suspect that is because this Government will continue to resist at every turn the accurate characterisation of gambling addiction as a health issue. They all continue to resist this because it will shine a massive spotlight on their failure to provide effective evidence-based expert-recommended harm minimisation and consumer protection to the product that is the leading cause of gambling addiction and harm in the state - poker machines.

Imagine if this Government put gambling support services where they belong in the Health department, alongside for example, services and programs related to tobacco addiction. That would provide a stark contrast between the comprehensive medical and sociological evidence-based approach taken in relation to tobacco addiction, compared to the industry-dictated evidence-ignoring pandering we see in the area of gambling addiction.

How exposing that would be. How devastating yet again for the tens of thousands of Tasmanians affected by gambling harm, that this Government will continue to sell them out in the interest of clinging to support from a politically powerful industry as a major party donor. And what is that we hear from the Opposition? Crickets. From the party that has shown themselves to be equally compromised and beholden to the gambling industry, and willing to sell out its community in the service of political self-interest. Shame on both the Government and the Opposition for the deplorable dishonourable failure to the Tasmanian community on this topic.



Moving on to the area of education, Madam Acting President. There is an incredible number of challenges faced in our education system at this time. The additional planning, preparation and management of COVID-19 that has been required has caused relatively new challenges. These come on top of and compound the significant longstanding issues experienced, such as our falling literacy and numeracy standards which, despite the initiatives and investments made, are described as dire by workforce demographer and quantity researcher Dr Lisa Denny in her recent analysis and report from the last 10 years of our NAPLAN data. Dr Denny made a very clear call for increased teaching resources, professional learning and additional support for students in need.

Students with a disability are a vulnerable cohort of students who are now being funded under a new needs-based funding model. Kristen Desmond, from the Tasmanian Disability Education Reform Lobby, says the state needs to urgently review that new reasonable adjustments funding model to assess whether it is meeting the needs and delivering the outcomes for students it intended. Where is the Government's commitment to undertake such a review? It is time that they make one.

In relation to education, with the escalation in mental health issues experienced by children in our schools and certainly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, we see the failure to adequately respond to this distressing situation in a chronic shortage of school psychologists to provide the support in schools that is needed. Much of that support needed then falls back onto already overloaded teachers and support staff.

There are of course other challenges faced with our education system as it exists now, which certainly prompt us to wonder about the substantial additional equally complex portfolio areas being added into an expanded department as a result of the disappearing Department of Communities Tasmania. While there may be broad correlation in their connection to children, the separate areas of education on the one hand and child safety and family support on the other, both warrant a focus that is dedicated specialist and purpose-built from policy planning through to implementation, resourcing and continuing improvement and reform. I, for one, am far from convinced that the bundling of the Department of Education with these elements of the Department of Communities Tasmania is well indicated or well advised. Suffice to say, I hold concerns about the impact of the changes proposed through the abolishment of the Department of Communities Tasmania and the reallocation of its component parts.

I agree with comments made by Professor David Adams from the University of Tasmania in an opinion piece on this topic in *The Examiner* three weeks ago on 2 March, where he said and I quote:

The Watt Review focus was all about reorientating the public service towards people and communities and the importance of open and transparent decision-making.

Abolishing Communities Tasmania appears to be another case of an important policy shift that bypassed the Parliament, bypassed the community and community stakeholders and, apparently bypassed engagement with the public service.

There is a deep irony in the government advocating for more public service focus on people and communities by abolishing the one department set up to focus on people and communities.

Ironic indeed. There will no doubt be many people, me included, keeping a close eye on the implementation and the future impacts of this decision. We will certainly be looking for the evidence to be presented and for the measures that will be put in place to ascertain effective outcomes achieved by this proposed way forward.

I will move on to another abrupt announcement that came in the Premier's Address, as others have touched on before me - a proposal to put a stadium on Hobart's waterfront. I brought this up in a lighthearted way yesterday as 'the edifice in the room' during our debate on the stadium bill. But today I will mention it again briefly, but in more seriousness. While we laughed yesterday when I pointed out the storyline in the television series, *Utopia*, in which a major stadium in Tasmania is proposed as an appealing announcable from the government of the day, I have to reflect more soberly on the fact that any government which finds itself taking an action that has been pilloried in a biting satire of poor government decision-making needs to take a good hard look at itself.

As a resident of Hobart, when I saw depicted on the front page of the paper, completely out of the blue, a massive stadium development on the river frontage of our city, I blanched. I believe the residents of Hobart are intensely proud of and attached to the visual beauty, the topographical sense of place and the unique character of our city. One would expect that any major development proposed that would impact on that beauty, that sense of place and that unique character would be carefully and respectfully brought forward. I do not believe that that is what we saw occur with this proposal; with this abrupt announcement and unveiling on the front page of the paper of this stadium proposal. I do not regard that to be careful. I fear that many would have found it to be disrespectful to the people of Hobart, to our council for the City of Hobart. I wonder when this Government might learn its lesson on the inadvisability of announcing and progressing developments without having undergone an appropriately comprehensive community consultation process to ensure there is community support and agreement.

I think of the Westbury prison and of the Burnie courthouse just this week. Certainly those are two recent salutary lessons that would be available to the Government, should it care to learn them. We heard, in our briefings on the Stadiums Tasmania Bill, that the proposed Hobart waterfront stadium would require three things to move forward: decision by the AFL to grant a Tasmanian team licence; adequate funding secured from a range of sources; and planning approval. Each of those is no small hurdle to clear. That may set some concerned minds at ease as to the likelihood of that proposal proceeding.

However, I have not heard clearly enough expressed by the Government that the very first priority should be a comprehensive and respectful public consultation and discussion on the proposal with the residents of Hobart. The member for Hobart, in his contribution on the stadiums bill yesterday, suggested that should such a project be taken forward on the planning front, it may well be dealt with under the Land Use Planning and Approvals Amendment (Major Projects) Act. If that were the case, the City of Hobart Council would be effectively sidelined as a decision-maker on this. Indeed, the opportunity for the local community to have a say would be diminished in that process. I find that prospect concerning.

That does not even touch on the broader discussion for our state as to the appropriate way to invest considerable funding in sports stadiums or other urgent priorities for our community, such as health, education, housing and others we may care to mention. Many others here and in the community more broadly have raised this matter and suggested that there would be better directions for considerable funding of that nature. I will not labour further in this contribution outlining that, but this will be another area that I and others will closely monitor in terms of progress.

There are, of course, myriad other issues which could be discussed in relation to the Premier's Address. Other members have canvassed some of them very well and I thank them for doing so.

To conclude, as I have detailed, there are some elements of the 2022 state of the state Address which I consider positive but alongside that there remain some disturbing and significant gaps and omissions. There are elements which raise equally serious concerns, I think, regarding the Government's priorities.

To reiterate, the actual status of the state's COVID-19 pandemic response remains unclear, as are any evidence-based plans for the next stages of that response, including the systematic public review and evaluation of our pandemic response, ensuring corporate knowledge is captured and lessons learned.

The state of our state's democratic, sociopolitical infrastructure and governance culture remains neglected, in my view, and not as healthy or robust as Tasmanians deserve. The state of our state's social contract with the community to govern for the least powerful and the most vulnerable is fraying, if not actively eroding.

No amount of back patting and self-congratulation about simple economic statistics will change the plain reality in Tasmanian homes and communities. In those communities, we still see too many of our fellow Tasmanians struggling with the basics: access to an affordable home; to basic health care; to a quality education. We are all far too old and wise here to fall into any empty rhetoric about aspiration that is based on a trickle-down philosophy. It is simply a lie. You can not just lift those at the top and expect to benefit those who are struggling most. COVID-19 reinforced that for us. Leaving anyone behind holds our whole community back.

Madam Acting President, on that I note the Premier's Address.

[4.47 p.m.]

**Mr WILLIE** (Elwick) - Thank you, Madam Acting President, you are very fair in your adjudications.

I acknowledge the traditional owners, the palawa people, of the land upon which we are gathering, lutruwita/Tasmania, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land. An acknowledgement of Country is about respect and recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal people's survival and continual connection with the land, spanning more than 50 000 years. If we stop to think about it for a moment, it is quite remarkable that all of us are lucky enough to share in and be proud of one of the world's oldest continuous cultures. Tasmanian Labor is committed to Treaty and justice for Tasmanian Aboriginal people and it is our sincere hope that we can work together for truth-telling and reconciliation.

We all have our own culture, history and story and my heart breaks for the Ukrainian people fighting an invasion on their land. They are defending democratic and sovereign state principles and we stand with them in condemning this action. As an island state, within an island nation, we are not immune to uncertainty. There is no doubt that we will all pay economically through the increased cost of living, to defend principles that have created peace and prosperity since the Second World War.

We have entered the third year of a pandemic and we are learning to live with COVID-19. It has been an uncertain time for many. In his state of the state Address, the Premier suggested quiet confidence in Tasmania, a strong economy, an abundance of opportunity, a state full of ideas. It was very out of touch from the reality of many Tasmanians, particularly in my Elwick electorate. In reality, after eight years we remain governed by a tired government that lacks initiative, integrity and progress, a government not delivering on Tasmania's most basic needs.

This morning on my way to work I drove past the petrol station. There was a display for \$2.21 a litre. Down the road on the Brooker, according to the Gutwein Government's highly ineffective fuel check website, motorists could expect to pay \$2.25 a litre. What happened to the Premier's urgent implementation of petrol price legislation he promised well over a year ago?

Another key election promise of the Premier was an assurance of no new taxes. Yet he has the audacity to pass a bin tax on every garbage collection. In Elwick, the Glenorchy council has already started raising rates. Residents already spend \$78 diverting landfill through a food and organics bin. How is the average household budget going to manage with the costs of living taking off? Tasmanians are now paying the highest power bills in the country. Aurora will be charging Tasmanians \$20 for an app regardless of whether you use it. This was endorsed by the Premier and his Government. TasWater bills will be going up 15 per cent over the next four years. That is \$450 extra they will be paying from the household budget. Why would the Government not work with these GBEs to bring down utility prices?

For Tasmanians the aspiration of home ownership is traditionally a rite of passage, a basic need and a fundamental right. Instead, families have found themselves trapped in an endless rental cycle. The dream of home ownership is unattainable for many. In the last eight years of the Liberal Government, annual rents have increased more than \$6000. Thousands of Tasmanians continue to languish on the waiting list for a safe place to call home. My office and I know far too many families living out of their cars because they simply cannot afford the average rent. Recently, I met a family forced onto the social housing waitlist because they could no longer afford the increase in private rental costs. They are now couch surfing between family and motels while they wait to be housed. Another family is sleeping in their car at night and spending their day sheltering in a hut at Tolosa Park in Glenorchy.

**Mr Valentine** - How do the kids get on when they have to go to school?

**Mr WILLIE** - There is no way they are participating in society, the economy, education or any fundamentals of life.

**Mr Valentine** - You have to feel for them.

**Ms Webb** - You have to do something for them.

**Mr Valentine** - That is exactly right.

**Mr WILLIE** - It will have an impact on those kids and their life prospects. It is absolutely disruptive to their education. It is Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

This family sheltering at Tolosa Park in Glenorchy rely on community food services to eat. It is simply no way to support an active, healthy participation in the economy or society. The Premier's solution is to remove Housing Tasmania from a minister with a track record of not delivering and make it an independent statutory authority, glaring proof that the Government does not understand and cannot deliver on the basic needs for Tasmanians.

Despite the pain on household budgets, the Gutwein Government is allegedly delivering a \$750 million floating stadium in Hobart within five years. I say 'allegedly' because the Premier and his Government have a track record of being aspirational but not delivering on infrastructure projects. They announce it with fanfare but it is really just a distraction from a government that has forgotten how to connect with everyday Tasmanians doing it tough. The cynic in me cannot help but wonder if the stadium will go the same way as the Bridgewater Bridge, the Cradle Mountain cableway, the underground bus mall, the four-lane Midland Highway or the northern suburbs passenger rail.

Mr President, I know you are deeply interested in this topic, but the northern suburbs passenger rail would be a huge benefit to my electorate and yours. It was back in 2018 and that the then infrastructure and transport minister promised, 'to pull out all stops to get the passenger rail built within five years'. The failure to progress the rail, indeed any kind of public transport for Hobart's northern suburbs, is another indictment on the Gutwein Government neglecting the basic needs of Tasmanians. No wonder people are cynical about the stadium. The Government is failing to deliver on its promises and running out of any political will to take on any hard challenge.

The Premier ignored the needs of local communities when preparing to open our state's borders last year. My office, and I am sure all of us here, fielded countless inquiries from nervous Tasmanians worried about the state's preparedness. These questions were fed back to the Premier in parliament. We were assured that there was a plan to keep all of us safe: vaccinations, contact tracing and restrictions were key. Yet, within days, we had seemingly moved into what the Premier was coining 'the transition phase.' Contact tracing was gone, restrictions were relaxed and if my office was receiving concerned inquires before, once this new message started, they escalated twofold. Our prepared state saw COVID-19 case numbers escalate, critical health services cancelled, confused testing advice and an overwhelmed hospital system operating at the highest escalation level. Some businesses closed and staff were left without incomes. Tasmanians moved to self-imposed lockdown because the Premier's plan to keep us all safe failed from the outset.

Then it was time to go back to school. We all know how this turned out. We had reassurances from the then minister that an audit was to be undertaken to ensure windows in classrooms worked as intended. The biggest issue concerning the Government at the time was whether they opened or closed. Despite my questioning, the acting minister would not publicly release the audit or guarantee whether works would be completed day one of Term 1, to ensure a COVID-19-safe classroom for students and staff.

The Premier was left to defend an absent minister for education who was holidaying in France; all the while, Department of Education staff had to cancel their own leave because they needed to respond to the escalating COVID-19 situation. I know from my close connections with the school system how angry they were about it. Through that time, the minister, Ms Courtney, lost support from her own workforce. As a precursor to the confusion in parliament, the Premier said one day that the school return might be delayed so all kids could be vaccinated. The next day, he reassured us that Term 1 would go ahead as planned. It was utter chaos. An absolute failure from the Premier to assure school communities, parents, staff and teachers that they had education at the forefront of mind and that they could deliver.

We have now had three ministers responsible for Education in one year. Surely, our children and hardworking staff deserve more respect and support. The new minister for Education has a lot to learn. His comments regarding rising suspension rates demonstrated his lack of understanding. In response to my questions in this place, the new minister said that rising suspension rates were a good thing because they were keeping children and staff safe. What he fails to understand is that it is an indicator of disengagement from education and students who do not have what they need to learn. It is not an appropriate response from a minister for education and I was quite concerned by those comments. I hope that he is learning fast. I do not know what advice he was given to say that.

Ensuring every child has access to the best education is the single most important thing we can do for a healthy community, and indeed for the future prosperity of Tasmania. I would like to see the new minister take on this suspension and antisocial behaviour problem in our schools. I suggested to him on the news, one night, that he could look at schools dealing with this issue well and there are really good examples across Tasmania. He could learn from those schools and he could replicate that across the system. I note he has had opinion pieces in both the northern and southern papers saying that is what he is now going to do. I think if an education minister wanted to take this issue on, you could see significant improvements. It has been years. Every census, the Department of Education is asked the same questions and we continue to see declines.

I know there are Department of Education staff working very hard, including our teachers and school staff, but they can only work within the parameters of government. I know that they are really struggling. In fact, I do not think it has been tougher to be an employee of the Department of Education working in a school, particularly at the moment with the COVID-19 case numbers.

As a former teacher, I am so frustrated that we have the worst education results of any state. As I said, the feedback I receive from schools is that they do not feel supported by this Government. Over the past 10 years, Tasmania's results have gone backwards in 14 of the 20 indicators measured by NAPLAN. This is a benchmarking result. That means our kids are doing worse now than they were 10 years ago. We are the worst performing state across every age group for reading and in spelling. We are the second worst in every age group in writing, the worst in every age group in grammar and punctuation, and the worst in years 5, 7 and 9 in numeracy.

If people think that the poor education results are an issue for young people and it does not concern them, it does. It will have complications for our future society and economy in Tasmania. Our students of today will be our business leaders, community leaders and political

leaders. They will be working in the health service. Everybody should be concerned about this.

A total of 39 per cent of school leavers are not engaged in work or further study. That is nearly double what it was when the Liberals came to power. There are more than 4000 unemployed young Tasmanians. Again, we have the unenviable statistic of our youth unemployment rate being higher than the national average. Yet, at the same time, we have key industries that continue to raise concerns for the skills shortages that they are facing; there is a massive disconnect between our education system and labour market demands.

It is a failure of this Government. It can simply not understand the connection between a good education, health and wellbeing, and a strong economy.

I am here today because I want all children to prosper. We owe it to our kids and future generations to do better. In years to come, I would like to look back and know that what I contributed to parliament was focused on ensuring no-one was left behind, considered our children and gave them every chance to be well educated, healthy, happy and successful, and that they were able to work in a solid economy that met the needs of all Tasmanians.

I assess an effective government as one that understands the challenges facing Tasmania, and acts to fulfil basic needs. We desperately need an effective government that recognises the cost of living as a real issue, commits to reducing big expenses like power bills for families, and acts on basic needs like petrol prices.

I welcome the five-week free bus trial. I went out on the weekend before that was announced and called for more affordable and accessible public transport. I do not know if that had any influence, but I certainly was out in front of the Government calling for that sort of measure, given petrol prices and struggling with household costs.

We need an effective government that will act urgently to ensure everyone sleeps in a safe and adequate home, a government that will make the dream of owning a home a reality once again. We need a government that will adequately fund our health system, reduce waiting lists and respect the hardworking health sector. With political will, ambition and smarts there is no reason why we cannot have this now.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredible efforts of Tasmania's health and hospital staff over the last couple of years. We all remain indebted to our health workers as they continue to navigate us through COVID-19. I acknowledge the personal toll it has no doubt taken on their personal wellbeing, and their families' wellbeing. I truly respect their commitment to the lives of all Tasmanians.

I acknowledge the Department of Education and its hardworking school staff. As we head into winter, they are under increasing pressure at the moment. They do such an important job. There is no doubt they are making many sacrifices right now to continue educating our children. I am certainly standing with them as we move into winter.

I am sorry that my state of the state contribution does not reflect the rhetoric of the Government. The last few years have been really tough on many Tasmanians. They need a voice. I look forward to better times ahead.

[5.05 p.m.]

**Ms LOVELL** (Rumney) - Mr President, I rise to give my reply to the Premier's state of the state Address. I do this somewhat reluctantly. I have tried over and over to prepare something to say in response to the Premier's Address. Time and time again I just did not know where to start. I went back and read my replies from previous years. I read through the Premier's Address again. I sat down at my computer every day and I could not get past one thought. What could I possibly have to say about the state of the state when everywhere I look there are people struggling? My contribution will be brief.

While the Premier can spin a series of positive lines, I have been watching and listening to my community. While no doubt there are positive things happening, and I will talk about some of those shortly, overwhelmingly what I am hearing from people is that they are struggling.

There has been a significant shift in the way Tasmania deals with COVID-19, the single biggest shift since the beginning of the pandemic. This has not been without significant concern in the community and it continues to this day. Our vaccination rates are very high. I want to acknowledge not only each and every Tasmanian who has rolled up their sleeve for a vaccine, but those incredible health professionals who have been there day after day to deliver the vaccines, especially those who have been going above and beyond to make the delivery of vaccinations to children as painless and stress-free as possible, which is no easy feat. I have seen some truly beautiful people supporting some very frightened little ones while I have been there with my own two children. The warmth and compassion shown to these little ones has been phenomenal.

I acknowledge each and every person who has supported children and young people returning to school this year. This was an enormous undertaking and continues to be. It is something that has required every single staff member in every single school to really take on more than has been expected of them at any other time. As a result, the majority of children and young people have been able to continue learning in a school environment. I thank everyone who has played a role in this. I know how important this is to my own children and how important it is to many Tasmanians. At the same time, I can only imagine how difficult it must be to manage with cases on the rise amongst students and staff and constantly changing from day to day. I encourage the Government to closely work with schools to support them and their families through an uncertain year.

So many Tasmanians have been impacted in their work by the response to COVID-19, from healthcare workers across the state involved directly in the response in providing care and support to those with COVID-19, giving advice over the Public Health Hotline, or those who have been impacted in the healthcare system in other ways. There are many other ways that COVID-19 has had an impact: those working in hospitality; security workers over a busy period in a completely new environment; school staff, whom I have already spoken about; and correctional officers having to work in a different and high-risk environment because of COVID-19. There are endless examples. In fact, I think you would be lucky to find a single workplace that has not been impacted in some way.

We saw hospitality businesses in particular hit hard over what should have been their busiest period. Business owners and managers were left with no choice but to shut their doors - lots of really popular well-loved venues. Workers were unexpectedly left with no shifts and, in many cases, no income. Limited support payments provide some relief for those who



were eligible, but there were many and remain many who suffered a significant and lasting financial impact.

Here is one of the biggest issues with COVID-19 in our state today. If we are to expect people to do the right thing and isolate or quarantine when they need to, to stop the spread of COVID-19 as much as we possibly can, we have to make it possible for them to do so. This means financial support, to enable people to keep paying their bills and put food on the table. It was a key part of the COVID-19 response when the pandemic first hit and it has to remain a key part.

With insecure work on the rise for so many years leading up to now and no sign of turning back that tide any time soon, there are so many people with no backup, savings, leave entitlements or safety net. We cannot lose sight of the fact while the current Omicron strain might be less severe for many, that might not always be the case and there are still many Tasmanians for whom any strain presents a very real and grave threat. We cannot lose sight of that and we need to make sure our communities are adequately supported to keep everyone as safe as we possibly can.

I mentioned the rise of insecure work before and this is another of my concerns when I considered the state of the state. Insecure work leaves workers in a very vulnerable position, vulnerable to exploitation and financial hardship. Only this week there have been reports of a case of wage theft involving an Indian restaurant in Hobart, with workers paid for many years a flat rate of \$10 an hour, well below the minimum wage and well below what they were entitled to be paid. This is the kind of exploitation that workers are vulnerable to when they are working in insecure work and it is devastating. We do not know the true extent of wage theft and other forms of exploitation in Tasmania because so much of that is done in a very underhanded way, but I am confident it is much more widespread than people might expect. This is absolutely something that needs to be closely examined and action taken to better protect the rights of workers. I wholeheartedly support a focus on this by the Government. I encourage the Government to take action to better protect vulnerable workers, because these types of exploitation can have a devastating impact on people's lives and are far too common.

On a very serious note, there is no doubt that this is a very difficult time for victims/survivors of child sexual abuse. With the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings under way, this is a critical moment in Tasmania's history. I welcome the commission of inquiry wholeheartedly, as we all do, and want to acknowledge all victims/survivors, those who have spoken out publicly, those who have made submissions to the commission and those who are not able to or do not want to speak about their experiences at all. I acknowledge each and every one of you. I believe you. I acknowledge your courage and trauma. I will do everything in my power to ensure you are treated with dignity, respect, compassion and empathy, and that this opportunity with the commission of inquiry is not wasted. That we use this opportunity to uncover the wrongdoings of the past and ensure they can never, ever happen again. I call on each and every one of us here in this place, and in the other place, to do the same. These last few weeks have been nothing short of devastating and re-traumatising for victims/survivors and I hope we, as a parliament, never put people through that again.

Many Tasmanians are feeling the pinch of the increased cost of living. In December last year, ABS data bestowed on Hobart the unenviable title of most unaffordable capital city in the country. Most unaffordable: not a title we should be aspiring to.

The property market is through the roof. The rental market is becoming more and more unaffordable. Groceries, fuel, everything is on the rise. Everything except wages, Mr President, with an annual wage increase of 3 per cent on average, balanced against a CPI increase of 4.5 per cent. That is not much of a balance; in fact, in real terms that is a wage cut and you do not have to look too far to see how that is impacting on people in our communities. Talk to anyone at the service station lately and you will hear about how increasing prices are having a very real impact on people's day-to-day decisions and priorities, their ability to do the most fundamental and basic things like put food on the table and get from A to B as they need to.

Some comments from members of the community sum this up better than I could:

Fuel price increases in low-income families are simply a reduction in capacity across the board. For people already penny-pinching, this just means not ordering winter wood, not turning on heaters, fewer and shorter showers, less and poorer quality, cheaper food. It is immediate and these significant jumps in price for both fuel and all things affected by fuel, all goods and services, result in less of everything. My mum is a disabled pensioner in the city. She has not been able to afford fuel to visit me since Dad died last week. It is that tight.

And another:

I can honestly say that we are spending more time at home, only buying fuel when we are near the cheaper outlets and generally tightening our belts.

Another, Mr President:

With the petrol prices increasing we are finding our retirement savings are being eaten into. Plus, our supermarket spending also increased, which is also contributing to our savings being depleted.

Another:

I need to drive from Deloraine to Launceston three days a week to support my parents, who are in their eighties and live in their own home. Because of the cost of fuel, I will need to rethink this support.

Another:

As a pensioner, we have to limit our outings because of the petrol rise. Plus, every single grocery item has risen. How far can you stretch a pension?

Another:

I choose the places carefully before I go. It is making it too expensive to go up north to see my granddaughter.

Another:

The fuel cost is a real problem for us. Less freedom. The kids do not get out as much. We used to love going for drives and we cannot afford to now.

And another:

For us oldies, it means more careful shopping trips and social travel. More sharing of cars. Us oldies have it pretty good if you have secure housing. It is the families and the working people who are suffering on no wage rises and/or insufficient social security payments.

These are real comments, from real people. People I expect would have their own opinions about the state of our state. We have to do better to support those many Tasmanians who are struggling and having to make the kind of choices I just relayed.

There is more I could say, but to be perfectly honest, I do not want to stand here today and make a long contribution that is entirely defeatist and negative. There is no doubt that there are positive things happening in our state. Members have recognised many of those, and I appreciated listening to those.

I know in my own electorate of Rumney, there are many good things happening. I attended an event, Sister Hives, a beekeeping collective of women to celebrate International Women's Day. It was fantastic and a really enjoyable day. I intend to speak more about that at a later time.

**Mr Valentine** - Are you going to have a hive?

**Ms LOVELL** - You never know, member for Hobart. There has been the opening of a new hobby shed at the Rokeby Neighbourhood Centre. The idea of a community member brought to life with the support of his neighbourhood centre. The Clarence Plains with their annual 'clean up the plains' day. It is always a day with many people spending many hours collecting the rubbish gathered in their surrounding parkland and vacant land. It is truly inspiring to see how the members of that community are always willing to pitch in and help each other. It is one of my favourite days of the year in my electorate.

There are good things happening. I do not mean to overshadow that. I have found this difficult. I have found it really difficult to stand here and speak in response to the Premier's Address without speaking honestly about and on behalf of those who are not doing so well in our community, for all the many and varied reasons there are.

I note the Premier's Address and I note all the ways we must do better for our state and those who live in it.

[5.18 p.m.]

**Mr DUIGAN** (Windermere) - Mr President, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. It has been interesting to hear what is going on in everybody's electorates. I take the opportunity to thank the Premier for his Address.

It is important to recognise the very robust position Tasmania finds itself in two years, almost to the day, since the beginning of a global pandemic the likes of which I do not think anybody in this room has ever seen before. It is also important to recognise the people who

have shouldered much of the load over those past two years. The people who have cared for our sick, our first responders, the people who have put themselves in harm's way so we might avoid it. The people who have kept the economic wheels of our state turning. The people in tourism, the people in hospitality, who have borne much of the financial brunt of the pandemic, the people of Tasmania, who, en masse, went out and got vaccinated and, to this day, continue to wear their mask where that is appropriate or they choose to do so.

I also take this opportunity to thank the decision-makers, the Premier and his team and the Director of Public Health, Dr Mark Veitch. The past two years have presented a constant stream of difficult decisions, decisions with real and profound consequences. The pandemic is still with us and there is more to do. I note from the bump in case numbers today that COVID-19 is clearly still with us. We are advised that the flu season to come might be problematic given a lot of us have not had colds or the flu in the past three years. There is more to do and we cannot afford to be complacent yet. It should be recognised that, as we stand at this point, our state is emerging from this extraordinary time stronger and more resilient and, as the Premier noted in his Address, with a quiet air of confidence.

We should feel confident. In January, for the eighth quarter in a row, a period of two years, CommSec ranked our economy as the best performing in the nation. Previously unheard of - employment at 3.8 per cent is the lowest in our history. More Tasmanians are in work and there is still unmet demand in the jobs market. These are great problems to have but obviously one of the consequences of this strong position has been the pressure that has come to bear on the Tasmanian housing estate. Prices, rents, affordability, availability: it is an issue that has been touched on without exception by members giving their responses to the Premier.

I have only been in this role for a short time, but what has had the greatest impact on me in that time is endeavouring to help people and families, often young people and families who suddenly find themselves with nowhere to live and nowhere to go. The commitment in the the 2021 state Budget was a \$615 million commitment set out to aggressively address this issue, with a commitment to provide 3500 social and affordable houses by 2027.

George Town is an area in my division which is experiencing housing stress. Pleasingly, between 1 January 2021 and 31 January 2022, it has seen the completion of 10 new social and affordable houses along with the release of 31 land lots developed in George Town. From February 2022 to June 2023, it is predicted another 11 houses will be built in George Town and 59 more affordable house lots will be developed among a total of 315 new homes, affordable land lots, and units of supported and homeless accommodation across northern Tasmania. You have to start somewhere. You have to start building these things and I am pleased to report that it is happening in my area.

The scope and scale of this issue requires bold and decisive action. I congratulate the Government and the Premier on the commitment to establish a new statutory authority, Housing Tasmania, to deliver more affordable homes and units, to deliver the houses and the services we need to meet this growing demand. It is further recognition by the Premier and a commitment by the Government to provide 1000 social and affordable houses across Tasmania every year, for the next 10 years.

In conjunction with providing more housing, the Premier outlined in his Address greater emphasis on helping Tasmanians exit the rental roundabout. If you are paying rent at the moment, that would be a stressful place to be as private rentals continue to go up. It is about

getting people out of that situation and into a home of their own. I have met several people, usually young families, who have taken part in the HomeShare program, a government program that has the state taking up to a 30 per cent stake in the purchase of the property, up to \$100 000 value for the period of 30 years.

The member for Rosevears told a lovely story about a mum who was hanging a picture on a wall for the first time, the first time that she was able to do that. I have a similar story, it is probably less romantic. I was walking down the street in Newnham and happened upon a youngish lady who was painting the doorframe of her house. We started talking and it turned out that she had taken part in the HomeShare program and was now doing the home maintenance on her home, which is my experience. With your home comes all those other jobs but it was with the same sense of pride that she was painting the doorframe of her house.

I am very pleased that the Premier has doubled the threshold up to \$200 000 or 40 per cent of the purchase price for new homes and up to \$150 000 or 30 per cent of the purchase price for established homes or units to eligible Tasmanians. As mentioned before, to make more Tasmanians eligible, the deposit requirement has been lowered from 5 per cent to 2 per cent. As people confront those cost of living issues, getting that deposit amount down is a really important and functional way to help people into that program. It is a great program and offers a very substantial leg-up onto the property ladder.

I note that, without exception, members have spoken about housing. It is clearly a pressing issue for us all. If you go through the Premier's state of the state Address you will see a really emphatic policy response to housing. In addition to the measures I have already mentioned, further programs include a reset of the land tax thresholds, rezoning and incentivising the development of land suitable for housing, headworks holidays for those proposed new developments, extending the First Home Owner Grant scheme, doubling the private rental incentives program and increased stamp duty concessions. As I say, a massive decisive policy response to an issue that is challenging all our communities.

I am pleased to report that work continues on one of my areas of particular interest, the mighty Tamar River, mostly the silted-up bit in the centre of Launceston, with which we are making a tilt for state 'capitalship' if we can get that cleaned up apparently. That will be good. It would be fair to say that the restoration of the tidal prism in the North Esk River stands as the most real-world sustainable response to that issue. Essentially, what happened back in the day was that the suburbs of Invermay and around that area were filled in to the tune of one million cubic metres of water that now does not flow into that North Esk River. If we can somehow get that water flowing it will have a substantial effect downstream of the North Esk River. That will be great for the health of the estuary.

While that may be some time in the future, I was very pleased to have a look at the work TasWater is doing at the St John Street pumping station as an important first step in improving the health of the estuary right now. It is part of the Launceston City Deal and a wider \$129 million project to upgrade the city's sewerage and stormwater system, which will hopefully transport us from the current 18<sup>th</sup> century arrangement, where even a fairly moderate rain event sees raw sewage spilling into the waterway. It is, I note, somewhat overdue, but a welcome first step and, importantly, work that is happening right now.

The Premier rightly noted that Tasmania is on track to be a global leader in green hydrogen production by 2030. We are expecting a decision shortly on our Commonwealth

funding application to establish a green hydrogen hub at Bell Bay. One of the key inputs for hydrogen, it will not surprise you to know, is water, H<sub>2</sub>O. The Launceston sewage and stormwater treatment process releases on average - and these are very conservative figures I had revealed last night - in the order of 17 million litres of treated water every day into the upper estuary. That is six gigalitres of water a year, a lot of treated water, a lot of water that people do not necessarily want to drink, that people do not necessarily want their crops to be irrigated with, but water which could be, I am told, more than adequate for hydrogen production.

In addition to Launceston, the George Town treatment plant yields 2.1 million litres of water a day. What a great way to deal with our wastewater, to turn it into green hydrogen. What a great way that is to store and bank our fantastic renewable carbon-free Tasmanian hydro power. Into the future that mix will include wind, solar, wave and tide.

We have seen in recent months decisions to close coal-fired electricity generation on mainland Australia ahead of time, in some cases years ahead of time. Projections are that around 30 000 megawatts of coal-fired electricity generation will wind down on mainland Australia over the next decade.

Now more than ever, plans for Bell Bay as a green hydrogen hub is bolstered by the proposed Marinus Link interconnector and Hydro Tasmania's Battery of the Nation project. Essentially it is about energy storage, as the member for Hobart touched on. That 30 000 megawatts of power can be replicated by new wind and solar projects that are coming on line. The issue is when the sun does not shine and the wind does not blow and you are in the centre of Sydney and turn on the lights and nothing happens. What storage will be is not yet set in stone. Batteries will play a role, but as again, the member for Hobart mentioned, battery storage is measured in minutes and hours, possibly. Battery of the Nation pumped hydro through Marinus Link has the capacity to provide energy storage measured in days and weeks, and that is hugely important for this state.

Recently, along with several members, the member for Launceston included, I attended the opening of the new UTAS Library, Inveresk campus. This is the first building to come on line in what will be a transformative project for the City of Launceston. The building itself is hugely impressive: an architectural award winner; low carbon footprint; recycled building materials. In fact, the building itself is designed to be recycled at the end of its life, whenever that may be. As I say, the library opened to the public. If you would like to have a look, you are more than welcome to walk in there any time of the day or night.

**Ms Rattray** - They are planning to relocate to the Launceston UTAS already? When they are ready to take that one down, it will be recycled. Surely they are not relocating already?

**Mr DUIGAN** - No, but it is an exciting project. I love to see the way that it brings Invermay into the city. It will be great for the CBD of Launceston.

What is also interesting is what is happening at the existing UTAS in Newnham, which is equally exciting, if perhaps not quite as visible. It looked as if it might be a problem. What were we going to do with that particularly large site? I am pleased to say that a new nation-leading agricultural research facility will be established, designed to accelerate Tasmania's already impressive agricultural capabilities. A total of 140 staff from the existing Mt Pleasant site in Prospect will move, along with 50 DPIW roles also moving to the northern hub.

Of course, Newnham will remain home to the Australian Maritime College. It will be further bolstered with the establishment of a \$30 million defence and maritime innovation and design precinct. It should be noted that already there is the \$329 million Blue Economy CRC, which is also at the Newnham campus. It is interesting to hear some of the work that is being done at the Blue Economy CRC in relation to offshore aquaculture projects.

Another exciting opportunity on the horizon for the Newnham campus is a proposed partnership between the university and the Australian Forest Products Association for world-scale forest industries research and development, the National Institute for Forest Products Innovation. It is a testament to the level of confidence in Tasmania that the UTAS relocation away from Newnham has not left us with a problem of what to do with the old campus, but a problem of how to fit in all the new entities that want to be based there and do business in Tasmania. These are good problems to have.

The Premier in his Address spoke about the aspirations this Government has for Tasmania, how it is critical that we lift our eyes and plan for the Tasmania we want in the future, next year, five years, 10 years and beyond - a thousand new and affordable houses every year for the next 10 years, \$1 billion over the next decade for critical health infrastructure, emissions net zero by 2030, 200 per cent renewable power by 2040, and an AFL team by 2028. I for one am a big fan of the new Hobart stadium proposal. It is \$750 million. It is in Hobart. It is contingent on an AFL decision. But what a wonderful asset for our state. A sports and entertainment precinct, ferry terminal, concert venue - a transformation of what I see is a reasonably under-utilised parcel of Hobart's sensational waterfront, without being a resident in Hobart and without wishing to insult anybody who is. I was not aware it was a floating stadium, but I think that just adds to the theatre.

I hear members' and the public's reservations. In answer to putting it on the front page of the paper, it is not a bad way to start the conversation. It is one of those things that we will be talking about a lot. I recognise that there is criticism of the cost of something like this. Would \$750 million not be better spent on hospitals or education? It is important to recognise that this is probably true of any government spending, depending on where you are coming from. The money could always be spent elsewhere. But for this Government, what is important is finding the balance.

I understand that the new stadium is not my patch, but UTAS Stadium is. I am very pleased to note that funding has been allocated for the continuing development of that asset, which will continue to be important, particularly for AFL football going forward in the state, with its flexible seating. An amount of \$65 million has already been allocated over the next three years. It will be better able to accommodate a range of sports, which will be good.

Along with the UTAS development, I am equally excited about the northern suburbs community hub. This is the repurposing of a massive old industrial site on Mowbray Road. It is a \$15 million project that will deliver much-needed sports facilities to the northern suburbs of Launceston. Kids' sport in Launceston, irrespective of what it is - soccer, basketball, netball - is absolutely booming. Demand is outstripping supply. If you ask any parent who is out with their kids playing basketball at the Elphin Sports Centre at 10 o'clock on a Friday night, because that is the only time they can get a court, they will tell you that we need more of this infrastructure. I am really keen to see the northern suburbs community hub power on and not stall. I will be devoting plenty of my attention to that.

There is work to be done. I suspect there always will be. What is important is that work is being done: \$900 million in infrastructure spending this year; unemployment at 3.8 per cent - the best performing economy in the nation. Hopefully, touch wood, the end of our current Public Health emergency is somewhere on the horizon.

Tasmania is going well. We should celebrate that. As ever, we should aspire to make it better. I note the Premier's state of the state Address. I move -

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I move -

That at its rising the Council adjourn until 9 a.m. on Friday 25 March 2022.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Mrs HISCUTT** (Montgomery - Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I thank the honourable members coming in tomorrow morning for our quorum call.

Mr President, I move -

That the Council do now adjourn.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The Council adjourned at 5.39 p.m.**