

**Tuesday 24 March 2020**

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

## **QUESTIONS**

### **COVID-19 - Self-Isolation Requirements**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.02 a.m.]

Case numbers of coronavirus are escalating in Tasmania. Experts have advised that there are two paths governments can take to save lives. You can increase the number of people tested and expand the criteria for testing so that everyone with symptoms is tested, not just those who have travelled from overseas or had contact with a confirmed case. You can ramp up tracing and track down everyone who might be infected and then you need to isolate every single one of them in accommodation or medi-hotels separate to their family homes. This is the Singapore model. This will require more PPE for hotel staff and medical staff to look after all of these cases. It also requires adequate treatment capacity in our hospitals. Given the shortage of supplies of testing kits, PPE and your lack of response to the Australian Medical Association's call to use medi-hotels you need another plan to save lives.

The only other option that has worked anywhere in the world is requiring people to stay at home, shutting schools, closing non-essential services, instructing everybody who can work from home to do so, and supporting the elderly and those with underlying health issues to self-isolate, limiting the spread of the virus so that the health system can treat all those who need it, when they need it and save lives.

Which path are you going to take? Increase testing, tracing and mandate isolation in separate accommodation to the family home for all cases to limit the number of infections and deaths? Or close schools and require all non-essential workers to stay home to limit the number of deaths and the spread of the virus. Tasmanians deserve to know what your end game is.

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Rebecca White, for that question.

My end game is to ensure the health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians. The way I and the Government have approached this is that we have taken the best medical advice available in the country regarding the steps that we have taken. When we have had a different challenge than other states, for example, the fact that we have an older population, when we have the advantage of our island's status, then we have moved. We have taken that step and we closed our borders before anybody else to protect Tasmanians.

Yesterday, tens of thousands of Tasmanians lost their job. Businesses that have been built up over generations closed. That happened to ensure that we could protect Tasmanians and, importantly, to ensure that Tasmanians appropriately take into account the social distancing rules to ensure that they are not mixing with other people. This will ensure that we protect more lives.

I said it this morning: the decision we took on Sunday night was the hardest and most difficult decision I have ever had to make in my life. For nearly 20 years my public life has been about building an economy and creating jobs. With one stroke of a pen we have taken away tens of thousands of jobs and we have collapsed businesses. I did not take that decision lightly; the Cabinet did not take that decision lightly. If the advice is to take further steps then we will take them. I will not shirk the responsibility that has been placed with me. My Cabinet will not shirk that responsibility.

Tonight, there is a National Cabinet meeting. We will be looking at the options that are in front of us, both as a country and as a state. Options to take further, more extreme measures will be discussed this evening. If the health advice is that we should take those steps then I will act in a heartbeat. I will take those steps. Tasmanians should rest assured that I will not lack the courage to make those decisions.

I say to Tasmanians that when you have been asked to self-isolate, do so. Even if you do not have a high enough regard for your own health and safety, have a regard for others. Take the appropriate steps and abide by the rules.

Those businesses that closed yesterday - and in my mind there was no ambiguity in the direction that was issued - but if you are not sure what to do, close. If you think you might fit but you are not sure, close. Take the steps that you can to protect the health, wellbeing and safety of Tasmanians. Do not let the sacrifice that tens of thousands of Tasmanians made yesterday go in vain. All of us have a responsibility.

Regarding my responsibility, if the advice says that we need to take further extreme steps then I will do so.

### **COVID-19 - Closure of Schools**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.09 a.m.]

We commend you for the decisions that you have taken to date to protect Tasmania from the threat of coronavirus. No-one underestimates the magnitude of the decisions that you have been required to take, or the impact that it has had on the lives of all Tasmanians. Sadly, more does need to be done. Overnight, there have been another six confirmed cases of coronavirus in Tasmania.

The lesson learnt from the around the world is that unless dramatic action is taken to shut down all but essential services, the virus will continue to spread. If that happens, the decisions you have made to date and the pain felt by businesses will be in vain.

New Zealand is the latest jurisdiction to shut schools. Yesterday, Victoria and the ACT brought forward the end-of-term holidays. The chief medical officer in Queensland has advised teachers over the age of 60 not to go to work. The Independent Education Union has also joined the chorus for schools to close.

There are still three weeks left of the term in Tasmania. Every day school remains open you are sending a mixed message to the community that while they are supposed to be living their lives

1.5 metres apart, crowded classrooms and playgrounds are somehow an exception. Every day you delay this decision lives are being put at risk.

Do not wait for advice from Canberra, in ignorance of the 124 other countries around the world who have already taken the step to close schools. No government has regretted taking decisive action early but they have regretted not acting when they had the chance. We need to close schools now.

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question and her interest in this matter. I acknowledge and thank our educators and those working in the education system supporting our children to get an education and supporting families.

I make the point - and it is a point that is double-sided - that right now we have 28 cases of the virus in Tasmania and all of them have been imported. All of them have come as a result of travel; all of them have come as a result of cruise ships. There is no evidence of community transmission yet in our community.

Regarding schools, I was clear yesterday that as of tomorrow any parent who wants to keep their child at home is able to do so. A number of parents up to this point have been taking that option. The Department of Education and our schools are working very hard and diligently to ensure that home schooling can still occur, bearing in mind that there are parts of Tasmania that have no internet access and many families do not have the resources available to them to conduct reasonable online learning in their homes.

The national advice, the best advice we are receiving from around the country, is that schools should stay open. Even if there are extreme measures taken and we take further steps, we will still need to keep schools open to provide for children of essential workers, because our economy has to continue.

I very clearly put on the record the advice we have received at a national level: the AHPPC has not supported closure of schools, given the lack of evidence of significant disease in children and lack of reported major disease spread in the schools. Furthermore, the closure of schools poses a major risk to children's education and mental health and wellbeing, particularly those from low socioeconomic regions, where schools provide an important environment for nurturing and learning.

We know that we have a significant number of children who turn up every day and the only breakfast they receive is in our schools. We know that the safest place for those children is in our schools because they do not have the home support or the home environment to support them.

**Ms White** - Every problem has a solution.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I will go on with the advice. The impact on the critical workforce and potential exposure of elderly relatives caring for children is also of significance. School closures would achieve some degree of additional social distancing, but the evidence of its benefit at this stage is minimal. The AHPPC views schools as an essential service and strongly supports keeping schools open. That is the advice I have before me.

Notwithstanding that, as of tomorrow, any parent who does not want their child to be in a school environment can keep them at home. The Department of Education is working very hard and very diligently to make certain that regardless of the circumstances a family finds themselves in they will be able to home school.

I make the point - and I made this point yesterday and it is a very important one - if parents want to take their children out of school then they must be responsible for those children out of the school environment. This is not taking them out of school and putting them on holiday and expecting them to run loose on the streets, or to go to their friends' places and congregate, and maybe be in contact with someone's elderly relative. This is serious.

I could see that when you asked that question and then took your seat that you are taking this very seriously.

**Ms White** - Yes.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I believe everybody in this place is. As I have said, tonight the National Cabinet will again meet. We will receive advice from the AHPPC. If that advice should change I will act in a heartbeat.

I must foreshadow to Tasmanians that there will be more measures. There will be and there has to be. They will be extreme and Tasmanians need to ready themselves for them. I am going to circle back to this every time I get to my feet today.

I say to all Tasmanians: do not let the sacrifice of those people and those jobs and those families yesterday slip by in vain. Make certain if you are asked to go into self-isolation that you abide by the rules. If your health is not of paramount importance to you, think about somebody else's health. Think about your community. Think about the impact this could have on older people. Think about what it could do to smaller regional communities. Heed the advice, follow the advice, and do the right thing and most of all, be Tasmanian.

## **COVID-19 - School Closures**

**Ms O'CONNOR to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.17 a.m.]

I acknowledge that I know you are doing your very best. We are being flooded with emails and phone calls from stressed-out parents and teachers. I received a text from a Sorell High School student this morning. Yesterday you stressed the importance of keeping a tight rein on children who have been kept home from school, and you just did so again, yet your Government is still claiming that schools, where a large number of children are kept in close proximity for a large part of the day, are not considered significant transmission problems.

This, as we know, is a very different approach from what has been taken by Victoria, ACT, New South Wales and New Zealand. How can it be that sending a child to school with hundreds of other children is not a risk but letting a child out to play with one or two other children is? Do you admit there is significant inconsistency here? It is sending a very mixed message to the wider community.

Yesterday tens of thousands of Tasmanians lost their jobs. As you said this morning, let us make these sacrifices mean something. Many Tasmanians are making huge sacrifices to protect us all, closing businesses, staying home, and not visiting elderly relatives. Can you see how keeping schools open will undermine the sacrifice that so many Tasmanians are making? How long do Tasmanian parents, teachers and students have to wait for certainty and at what point will you provide that and close schools to all but the children of health and emergency services workers?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens, Ms O'Connor, for that question. As I said in my previous answer, if any parent wants to remove their child from school they can do so as of tomorrow, and I expect that many will, but in terms of closing our schools, we have one of the most disadvantaged populations in the country. We need to ensure that those children who do not have a safe home environment and who are not being provided with clear instruction and support have somewhere to go as well as those children of our essential service workers. Our schools need to provide that support.

I can understand some of the concerns of educators and I thank them for the work they are doing. As we work our way through this, our schools are going to need to remain open. Even if parents do not want their children to be there - as I have said very clearly, they can take them out - we need to ensure that we can provide support for essential service workers. We need to ensure that we can provide support for children who do not have the necessary support elsewhere.

For many of our children, the safest place for them, in respect of the virus and other matters, is in our schools. We need to ensure, if a decision is made to close or alter the operating model, that it is based on the best health advice that we can receive. I have made it perfectly clear that I and the Cabinet will take that advice and we will act on it. We will be having a conversation tonight about these matters and others and we will make decisions informed by that advice.

## **COVID-19 - Community Testing**

**Ms OGILVIE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.22 a.m.]

This crisis is testing us, our grit, our determination and fortitude as Tasmanians. I have pushed hard for strong measures from the very beginning and I am here to do that again today. There is a great pain in our business community, our workforce and families. They say, we say, as good Tasmanians, we will take the heat, go into hibernation, reorganise and make do, but you must act now to implement broad-based community testing. We need to root out this virus from every nook, every cranny and every corner of our island. We owe it to everyone, particularly everyone who took the hit for our broader community yesterday, and we are of one voice with this. I implore you: will you now please direct that widespread community testing be undertaken as a matter of priority?

## **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Ms Ogilvie, the member for Clark, for that question and her interest in this matter. We are testing in line with the national guidelines. We are doing more than the national guidelines, as was explained by the Deputy Director of Public Health, Scott McKeown,

this morning. When there has been a need to test community members who do not fit the national guidelines, testing has been provided.

We are relying on the national advice. It is important that I am not advised by Twitter or by social media. I am advised by the best health professionals in this country. This is what they are telling me to do and I will continue to follow that advice. We will continue to do the very best we can with the information we are being provided. If that advice changes at a local or national level, we will act. That goes without question or hesitation in doing the right thing by Tasmanians.

I want to, as the member did, speak about the immense sacrifice people made yesterday. Some of them will be watching this today and they will be thinking, words are cheap; I have lost my job or I have lost my business, and I have to tell you, my heart goes out to you. I have watched people in this city, in my electorate, who have sweated blood for decades to build businesses. Today, the sense that I get is that the realisation of the magnitude of that decision of yesterday will be dawning on them. I want to say to them that I am sorry that we have had to take this decision. I am sorry for the circumstances that you find yourselves in. We will get through this. We will work with you to put your business into hibernation. The federal Government is working with us to provide additional income support.

This will go on for some time but businesses will reopen and jobs will be provided. The most important thing as we work our way through this is that you abide by the rules, that you do what you can as an individual to ensure that you keep yourself, your family and your community safe. For those who are still working, for those that have not borne the brunt of yesterday's decision, take heed of the sacrifice those people have made and do whatever you can to ensure that you abide by the rules. This is not a game. It is not a practise match. This is the real deal, we need to be serious and we need to ensure we all do whatever we possibly can to get through it.

### **COVID-19 - Support for Businesses**

**Mr TUCKER to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.27 a.m.]

Can you outline how the Government is working to secure and support Tasmanian families and businesses and how important it is to work together and follow the rules to get through this challenging time?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr Tucker, the member for Lyons, for that question. I am not going to repeat much of what I have said today. Everybody is clear about the message I have been providing to this parliament this morning.

I want to foreshadow a couple of things. One is that we will provide an additional stimulus package later this week. We will do what we can with the resources of the state to fill the gaps, provide support where it is needed, ensure that we focus on those areas of key importance as we work our way through this, support those businesses, employees and our community and ensure we have the appropriate networks and supports to help people through this.

There is going to be an immense outpouring of grief over the next couple of days in where we find ourselves. On top of that, there may come even more measures and we are going to need to support Tasmanians as we work our way through this. We are going to need to do this together.

There is no other way to do this. Hopefully, and I honestly believe this, there will be a period when it is going to be very, very tough but we will come out the other side of this. The country will come out the other side of this. The world will come out the other side of this. However, there is going to be significant challenges and damage along the way as we do work our way through this.

I want people to know that we will take the decisions we need to take, we will always act on the best advice, our decisions will be informed and, when that advice is provided, our decisions will be swift. We will take the steps that we need to but we will also work with our community in ensuring that the initial support that we provided only a week ago is augmented again this week, and the national package, which is now the second and the more significant package that was delivered on Sunday is augmented as well to try to fill the gaps to make certain that we can support people that we can catch people that we help with the measures that we take, but it is going to be tough.

Everybody is going to need to share the load - all three levels of government, our business community, our NGOs, our communities, our families and our people. We are going to need to do this together and I once again urge Tasmanians to take personal responsibility to do what they can to protect themselves, to protect their family and their community and, most of all, abide by the rules. It is going to be tough but if we work together we will get through this and we will come out the other side.

### **COVID-19 - Test Kit Availability**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.31 a.m.]

The World Health Organization has warned that without a large-scale effort to test and trace coronavirus the disease can spread quickly and silently throughout the community. There are significant concerns that Tasmania is still not conducting enough testing to provide reassurances that community transmission has not already started.

Tasmania has the second lowest rate of testing in the country. We cannot afford to squander the opportunity we have been given to save lives and get ahead of this virus by virtue of geography and early actions. How many test kits are in Tasmania right now and do we have enough tests to do the broad-based testing and test everybody with symptoms as they present?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for those questions and her undoubted interest in this matter. I will repeat some of the points I made in relation to a similar question a moment ago.

The country's national testing stock levels have been increased with a further 97 000 tests arriving recently. Tasmania is testing in accordance with the national guidelines as I have indicated. We have actually tested outside of those national guidelines on occasion, as was explained this morning by the Deputy Director of Health. We have expanded our criteria to include people with fever and respiratory symptoms who have travelled from interstate and 14 days previously.

Public Health further advises that Tasmania has enough test kits to meet current demands and the number of people that we are testing is consistent with the national average. Obviously testing is available in major population centres - in the south, in the north, across the north-west and across the north-west coast.

**Ms White** - How many test kits do we have?

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I do not have that information to hand other than the advice that I have is that we have enough test kits to ensure that we can meet the current testing demands.

### **COVID-19 - Use of Medi-Hotels**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.34 a.m.]

Yesterday the AMA called for the immediate announcement and implementation of medi-hotels to support all patients who are infectious with coronavirus but do not otherwise require hospitalisation to be quarantined in isolation. This is in line with the best practice World Health Organization recommendations. The AMA said, and I quote -

Supporting all Tasmanian patients with COVID-19 through their illness by adequate hospital care if seriously unwell, or by appropriate infection control isolation in medi-Hotel accommodation if only mildly symptomatic, is essential.

...

... Isolation of all patients infectious with COVID-19 is critical; it ensures the community is doing its bit to fight the epidemic and it insures frontline health workers have the resources to manage the critically ill patients in front of them.

...

... Medi-Hotel isolation supports care while a patient is infectious and is an excellent solution that protects access to the scarce high-level hospital beds that severely unwell patients require.

Will you announce and implement medi-hotels in a fight against coronavirus immediately, as the AMA has called on you to do?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question and her added interest in this matter. I believe the Leader of the Opposition would be well aware of the steps that we have taken in terms of the UTAS Fountainside accommodation. My understanding is that there is other accommodation being utilised for self-isolation as well, where individuals do not have the correct environment to be able to self-isolate at home, or that there are other matters that necessitate them being self-isolated elsewhere. Those steps are already being taken.



Regarding self-isolation at home, I make the point that I made yesterday, that if you are being asked to self-isolate at home, you must self-isolate at home, and that your family in close contact should self-isolate with you.

**Ms White** - This is the problem. The World Health Organization says that that spreads the virus, having greater infections.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - In terms of the practices that we are employing, we are acting on advice. In terms of the requirement for self-isolation, I say to Tasmanians that it does not mean pop down the shop and buy a milkshake. It does not mean wander off into your community and have a cup of coffee. It means that you self-isolate. Regarding self-isolation and the strategy we have been employing, the Tasmanians in quarantine are being contacted daily to check on how they are doing and offered support if they require it, as well as to remind them of their obligations to remain in self-isolation for the full 14 days. The State Controller, Darren Hine, is also operationalising police compliance teams, the PCT, to ensure compliance. There will be spot checks. It will be an offence to not comply. Penalties will be imposed on those who do not comply.

**Ms White** - Medi-hotels?

**Mr GUTWEIN** - I have made the point that you are aware of the fact that we have entered into agreement with UTAS and Fountainside and that we are utilising other accommodation providers. We are assisting people and supporting them to self-isolate in those facilities when it is appropriate.

**Ms White** - It is different from what the AMA called for yesterday.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - We are acting on the national advice. I thank the AMA for their interest in this matter but, at the end of the day, we are getting the best advice we can at a national level through the AHPPC. We will continue to take that advice.

## **COVID-19 - School Closures**

**Mr STREET to MINISTER for EDUCATION and TRAINING, Mr ROCKLIFF**

[10.38 a.m.]

Can you update the House on what is being done to ensure students are able to continue to learn despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, and how the Government is also prioritising safety in our schools of high risk?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Before I begin, I reinforce the messages from the Premier this morning in terms of our thanks to all our staff within our schools, our public education environment and across all sectors for what we know is an incredibly challenging time. Like other members have reflected, we are all receiving messages from those within the front line of our education system about their level of anxiety and the needs of their schools at this particular time. I thank them for that feedback. We are doing all we can across Government and the Department of Education in addressing those concerns.

I also thank the Australian Education Union, who I have been in very regular contact with over the last number of weeks and for them also reflecting the concerns of their members. I assure the AEU and all our frontline education staff that we are listening intently to all their concerns.

The best public health advice we have at this time is that we keep our schools open. That is the national and state clear advice. I concur with the Premier's comments this morning on that. We have also made it clear that we respect parents' right to choose. Parents have the option of keeping their child at home if that is what they choose to do. The Premier has said that, in Tasmania's case, on Wednesday 25 March parents and carers may choose to keep their children at home due to COVID-19 should they wish. This is reflected in a letter to all parents and guardians of our public students as well. The independent, Catholic and the public education sectors are also working closely together to ensure those communication channels are open.

With respect to our schools - and this is the point Ms O'Connor made before - last Friday there was 71 per cent attendance within our public education system. Yesterday, 23 March, attendance was 64.6 per cent. To put that in context, on 23 March 2019 attendance was 88.7 per cent, so parents are choosing to keep their kids at home. We are very mindful of that fact and with our plan of keeping schools open in some form we recognise provision must be made for children of essential workers and frontline staff. We are preparing for all scenarios and exploring multiple options for supporting student learning. This reflects the current expert advice that school sites should remain open. Parents who choose to keep their children away from school will be provided with opportunities to help children learn from home but only as far as is reasonable.

Support is now available for parents on the department's public website called Learning from Home and includes practical considerations to keep children connected and engaged with learning, such as establishing routines and setting up learning environments. Online tools are also provided such as links to online learning tools, resources to support students and parents and advice for managing behaviour online. There are online learning websites for mathematics, enquiry, reading and writing, science and wellbeing.

We recognise many of our learners do not have internet access at home and we are taking that into account with alternative learning opportunities being developed for those students should the closure of school sites be necessary. For example, the department is taking a lead role nationally in developing resources in conjunction with the ABC schedule of programs.

When it comes to our libraries, given library members and staff are much more likely to fall into the older demographic and carry a high-risk profile, we have made the decision to close libraries to safeguard the public, which is consistent with the closure of other sites such as TMAG. Libraries Tasmania will continue to offer online services such as e-books, e-magazines, music and films, and staff are also working on ways to offer modified and new services to the public, including a home library service. We recognise that we need to ensure we keep people socially connected online and talking to each other as much as possible, so those online resources are available.

We recognise that for a large proportion of our children school offers far more than just a place to learn and to read and write. We are very conscious of this. Our schools in Tasmania are safe places providing a range of essential wraparound services in response to the high levels of disadvantage within our communities. At this time, when there is a level of great anxiety, we need to consider how our schools continue to support our most vulnerable children and communities.

I will finish where I started. We are taking expert public health advice from around the country, recognising that advice includes that schools are to remain open, but all scenarios are being taken

into account. I want to assure our hardworking frontline teachers, our principals, our support staff and our teachers that we are listening and acting on the concerns at local school level and we are forever thankful for the work they are doing to ensure that our children are provided with the best possible education, either at a school site or indeed in a home learning environment.

### **COVID-19 - School Closures**

**Dr WOODRUFF to MINISTER for HEALTH, Ms COURTNEY**

[10.46 a.m.]

Medical evidence and the experience of other countries in the grip of COVID-19 tells us every day we delay effective social distancing is a day too long. Health workers are the ones who will confront the price of inaction. There is strong health evidence that children can pass the coronavirus to other people. Allowing students to mingle in groups presents a threat to your medical guidelines that aim to contain this disease. How can you continue to advise parents that kids should not have sleepovers or school holidays yet ignore the everyday risk of them in a classroom or bus with the same friends? Parents, teachers and schoolchildren across Tasmania are in a state of anxiety and frustration over the mixed messaging. The Premier is correct: this is serious. It is a matter of life and death and the lost jobs of thousands of people cannot be in vain. Will you recognise this risk and push for school closures?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question. I reiterate the points that have been made by both the Premier and Deputy Premier regarding social distancing and school closures. We know with the measures we have taken, and are considering taking, that some of these measures are very blunt and we need to understand the full ramifications of each of these decisions and any unintended consequences.

Both the Premier and the Deputy Premier have outlined quite extensively today why the Government has made that decision, which has been made on expert advice. Over the proceeding weeks, in terms of preparedness of our hospital system and the responses within Public Health, we are acting proactively to ensure that every time we receive advice from the experts we act. The Premier has made it very clear on a number of occasions that he will make sure that he will act decisively with the interests of Tasmanians at the heart of every decision.

We are working through these options, as the Deputy Premier has said. We know we have uncertain times ahead and I thank those staff who are working very hard across our private and independent schools because the impact on them, the impact on children and the impact on families across Tasmania needs to be considered.

With regard to school closures, the Deputy Premier and the Premier will continue to act on advice and I have no doubt they will act decisively and appropriately if that advice changes.

## **COVID-19 - Use of Medical Students for Public Health Hotline**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.49 a.m.]

Last week I asked your office to consider using University of Tasmania medical students to staff the overstretched Public Health Hotline. The University of Tasmania has hundreds of students currently training in medical fields, including 600 medical students, 830 nursing students plus paramedics, social work and psychology students. Many of these have already conducted medical placements.

Have you approached UTAS to seek their assistance responding to the coronavirus crisis? Will you urgently recruit and train UTAS students to support frontline health workers and help manage the public health hotline as this massive health challenge continues to escalate?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. The Public Health Hotline is staffed by highly-skilled nurses. It is also supported by highly-trained public health doctors. My understanding is that there is no better or more highly-skilled group in Tasmania to provide that advice. I know that we are drawing in other resources and training them at the moment.

**Mr O'Byrne** - Is that now? It was not the case.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - As I understand it. On 23 March, yesterday, the call centre moved to the Vodaphone Call Centre. A further 40 new staff have been brought on, sourced from casual pools across the public service.

**Ms White** - Are they clinically trained? They are not nurses.

**Mr GUTWEIN** - The advice that I have in front of me is the advice that I have, but I will check that.

These measures have increased the level of support for handling calls from the general public and is assisting to triage the calls. The service is open 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., staffed through two shifts daily with up to 10 call takers per shift as it stands at the moment. We will resource that as necessary and as demand requires.

I say to the people who have been involved in that service that they have done an extraordinary job to date. Spikes and surges have occurred as a result of certain decisions or certain matters that have been discussed in the public discourse, which has elevated people's concerns. They have taken, on some days, significant numbers of calls, well in excess of 1000 calls. They have been doing a very, very good job.

I will look into the matter you have raised. As we work our way through this, the Government will not hesitate to draw on resources available to it to ensure that we can meet the needs of Tasmanians. It is important that across the board we look at the level of resources available because this will go on for some time. There will be fatigue and there will be challenges that individuals will face. I will take on board the matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition but, as I have said, my advice is the advice in front of me. I will look into the matter that has been raised.

## **COVID-19 - Government Support for Businesses**

**Mr TUCKER to MINISTER for SMALL BUSINESS, HOSPITALITY and EVENTS, Ms COURTNEY**

[10.53 a.m.]

Can you update the House on the available Government support for businesses and individuals impacted by COVID-19?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question. These are unprecedented times for Tasmania. As a government, we are doing everything we can to ensure that we are mitigating the economic and the social impacts of COVID-19.

We understand the restrictions that were announced on Sunday night and then enacted yesterday have fundamentally changed the way Tasmanians live. As the Premier has outlined, our thoughts are with those deeply-impacted individuals all around the state. These restrictions have been put in place because it is our duty to act, to keep Tasmanians safe and protect their wellbeing. I thank all the people who have been so responsive, both within the private sector and making sure that they are complying, and also within the public sector who have been supporting these restrictions.

Regarding the thousands of Tasmanians whose livelihoods have been lost, we have been working closely with the federal government to make sure that we have appropriate support mechanisms in place. I will outline the federal government support package. With the timing of the announcements, there are many Tasmanians who only in the last day or so are really starting to understand and grapple with the full ramifications of the changes that were made at midday yesterday.

The federal government has announced a second stage of economic support totalling \$1.89 billion across the forward Estimates, which represents 9.7 per cent of national annual GDP. The support is designed to help businesses and households through what we all know is going to be a very difficult time. Having had the opportunity to speak to many of those businesses, I cannot grapple with how they are feeling.

With the measures that we have already put in place, and are continuing to put in place, it is important that we not only support businesses and employees now, but ensure that we are assisting them to be able to recover post this challenge. An additional \$750 payment has been made available to eligible households in addition to further support to retirees, including earlier access to superannuation. Substantial business support measures have also been announced, with payments up to \$100 000 available for small and medium-sized businesses, not-for-profits and for charities that include -

**Ms Ogilvie** - By way of interjection, thank you, minister, but businesses are telling me that the money is not flowing. Can you address that?

**Ms COURTNEY** - Yes. I thank the member for her interjection and I will address her once I have finished outlining the steps that the federal government has been taking.

These payments will help with businesses and their cash flow so that they can keep operating. This is in addition to temporary relief for financially-distressed businesses, including flexibility of the Corporations Act.

These measures which were outlined by the federal government on the weekend are in addition to the measures outlined by the Premier and Treasurer last week, the \$420 million support package. It is important for everyone to recognise that we are working on a second government stimulus package and we will have more to say on that in coming days.

I thank businesses for their feedback. We recognise that support needs to flow quickly. From a state perspective, we are bolstering the services and the staff within Business Tasmania and support lines so that people can get through. We all recognise that there have been some challenges with some of the other systems in other jurisdictions. We are actively looking at providing further support in those areas so that when people phone up, they are able to get access to the information. It is one of our highest priorities with measures that we have announced - and further measures that the Government will announce - that people can access them in a very timely way. We understand that they are hurting now. I take that on board.

I thank the businesses for their constructive engagement. People have been able to provide very constructive feedback so that we can respond appropriately and that is the very essence of what we are trying to do.

These are incredibly challenging times. None of us could have even contemplated the position that we are in now several months ago. However, I assure Tasmanians and Tasmanian businesses that we will get through this. We have significant challenges ahead but we can get through this by working together. We can get through this by ensuring that the measures that the Government has put in place, while they restrict your lives and impact on your businesses, will save lives. I urge all Tasmanians to listen to the messages and to understand that the Government is working hard to be able to support you.

### **COVID-19 - Ventilator Availability**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.59 a.m.]

Ventilators are essential to treat people who have their health severely compromised by coronavirus. Across the country, urgent orders have been placed for more ventilators to increase the capacity of intensive care beds. Victoria is purchasing 2000 more, New South Wales is purchasing 1700 more, and the Australian Government is purchasing 1000. How many ventilators does Tasmania have and how many more is the Tasmanian Government purchasing?

**ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank members for their interest in this matter and the Leader of the Opposition for the question. You might have seen that I indicated some level of mirth regarding the question. At a national level and with a national stockpile, there is an enormous effort going on to achieve access to ventilators and to ensure we have additional capacity across the country. We are working with the national stockpile and the national government. We understand there is a need to ensure we have more ventilators available. My understanding is that we have around 50 in the

state. We are working hard to ensure that, when we can access those, we can access the national stockpile. As part of the national stockpile, we will have access and we are making our case at a national level.

I noted some of the statements made by other states, perhaps coined more in hope than in intent, some brave and bold statements made as to access and what they were intending to purchase. All of us are operating within the same supply chain. We are all doing our best to ensure that it will be available through the national stockpile when we need that equipment. There is a world pandemic underway. There are enormous challenges in ensuring we can supply to the national stockpile and ensure states have what is necessary available to them.

We are working with the national government. They are looking at a range of measures for ventilators and other options. We may have access to a stand-down or a slightly lighter option but one that would do the job. They are looking at those matters across the country and they are looking where they can to increase supply.

### **COVID-19 - Government Support for Public Sector Employees**

**Ms WHITE to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[11.03 a.m.]

The coronavirus pandemic has sent shockwaves through the community and the economy, and people are rightly worried about their individual futures and the future of our economy. Government plays a crucial role in supporting their own workers while maintaining some level of confidence in the broader economy. With the private sector under pressure, the role of the public sector becomes even more important, particularly given the relative importance of the Tasmanian Government's role in the economy in comparison to other states.

During these uncertain times, will you guarantee that every public sector worker, including permanent, casual and fixed-term contract positions, will keep their jobs and have their wages, conditions and their regular weekly earnings maintained into the future? Can you reassure casual employees in the public service that they will continue to receive their normal and regular weekly earnings if they need to self-isolate or are restricted from attending work? Can you guarantee that existing contracts for services and work will be maintained for the private sector?

### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. Yes, those employment levels will be maintained. Regarding casual employees, I spoke with DPAC last night to look at extending personal leave conditions so that they would be paid if they need to self-isolate. It is only fair and reasonable that we do that. My expectation is that we will be one of the few employers in this state hiring during this period. It is important that we maintain that workforce because there will be a herculean task we will need to ask of our public servants. I thank all agencies, noting that many of them are being asked to do tasks that they would not be doing on a normal, day-to-day basis. The intention is to ensure that our public sector workforce remains and that we will support our casuals. Importantly, we would need to hire more people into the public sector as we progress. That is a simple matter of fact.

As to contracts or arrangements we have in place and work that needs to be done by the private sector, especially in infrastructure, and the package I announced last week regarding maintenance and other matters, we will ensure that we put those contracts to the market in a timely way. The focus of last week's package was to ensure, as opposed to having shovel-ready jobs out there, that we have screwdriver and paintbrush jobs, which lead to a lower level of procurement rules in ensuring we can get that work done quickly.

### **COVID-19 - Support for Businesses**

**Mr STREET to MINISTER for STATE GROWTH, Mr FERGUSON**

[11.06 a.m.]

Can you please provide the House with an update on what the Tasmanian Government is doing to support Tasmanian businesses during this difficult period?

#### **ANSWER**

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Franklin, Mr Street, for his question. The Government is doing, and will do, everything we can to manage and mitigate the economic and social impacts of this terrible virus. I restate my and our Government's thanks to members opposite and on the crossbench for the support they have shown toward the measures being put in place by the Government to support our state. I give special thanks to Tasmanian businesses, who have been fantastic to work with and have implemented the new rules without equivocation or complaint. They have been sacrificial and, to a woman and a man, they have been great Tasmanians. We thank them, as they have been working through difficult decisions with their staff.

The Government's social and economic support package is designed to support the health of Tasmanians, to do as much as we can to protect and stabilise our economy and keep as many Tasmanians in jobs as possible. We expect to open our \$20 million interest-free loan scheme by the end of this week to provide cashflow support for eligible businesses, particularly in the hospitality, tourism, seafood and export sectors. We have been working very hard on that. We have established additional capacity in Business Tasmania hotline to provide more support to businesses dialling in. An additional advice line has been established through the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to assist business. We are meeting regularly with our business sector.

Last Friday, I hosted teleconferences with our transport and logistics sector, all sectors within that industry and our large employers. This was a valuable opportunity for Government to stay in touch with business, the key players, to work together and understand their situation, to exchange views on the current circumstances and problem-solve together. Some of the cooperation that is occurring in these various industries, including in some cases between traditional rivals and competitors, has been nothing short of breathtaking and they are a very wonderful group of people. We are committed to doing more with these individuals and businesses in future.

On behalf of Government, I will be tabling legislation to facilitate the implementation of several of the Government's key stimulus measures later today, which the Premier has already announced. The Taxation and Related Legislation Bill will facilitate the waiving of payroll tax for businesses with employees in those affected industries. The bill will also facilitate the provision to businesses of a one-year payroll tax rebate for new youth employees, people under 24, employed



between 1 April and 31 December 2020. Equally importantly, the bill will also extend the First Home Owner Grant at \$20 000 out to 30 June 2022, a further two years.

The Government's 50 per cent discount on liquor licensing fees and waiver of all application fees for the calendar year 2020 is backdated to 1 January of this year. I am advised that the commissioner has issued a total of 1900 licence fees for the 2020 year in January and they are due for payment on the 31st of this month. Those who have already paid will be refunded their 50 per cent while those who have not paid will be re-invoiced for the 50 per cent lower fee amount and also be given an extension month to pay that account.

We also appreciate that cash flow is king for businesses and it is critical right now. That is why we have reduced our normal terms of trade for payments by government agencies from the normal 30 days to 14 days. We want to put more cash back into businesses more quickly where we can.

In his Premier's Address earlier this year the Premier announced that we will introduce legislative time frames for the permit process for energy, water and sewerage services. With the crisis, this is now more important than it was just a few weeks ago. Preliminary work to deliver this is already under way. I advise the House that we remain absolutely committed to fully consult and deliver within this time frame in order to ensure that our state is as best prepared for recovery once the current acute crisis has passed.

Our state is not immune to the challenges of coronavirus. We know that. This Government remains committed to working with business and industry to ensure that we minimise the impact on our economy and protect jobs as much as we can. Importantly - and I know people across this Chamber will take this view - we want our state to be able to bounce back strongly and as quickly as possible.

We are working on a second Tasmanian Government stimulus package that will help Tasmanians even further. It is informed by our engagement with Tasmanian businesses and employees. The Premier expects to announce this in coming days.

We are not able to provide a time frame as to when this challenge will be over but what we can provide across this Chamber and across the political spectrum is hope and continuing to do everything we can to support our businesses as employers and keep as many of their Tasmanian employees in work as possible. We can provide hope for the community that if we work as one and follow the rules we can slow the spread of the virus and we can provide hope that we will come out the other side of this as a strong, resilient and proud community of Tasmanians who will rebuild our state.

As I conclude, I acknowledge business owners and workers who are experiencing loss of income, loss of equity, loss of capital and loss of employment. We will stand with you. We will stand with Tasmanian businesses and we will stand with their workers, whether they are continuing in work or whether they have lost work, to ensure they can get the best possible outcome and the best possible employment prospects as we rebuild and recover from this economic crisis, as Tasmania is capable of doing.

**Time expired.**

## **Answer to Question**

### **COVID-19 - Public Health Hotline**

[11.13 a.m.]

Madam Speaker, I want to answer one question, if I may, about the Public Health Hotline. It has been staffed by nurses up to this point. The Tasmanian emergency information service has been activated. On 23 March we brought onboard another 40 new staff from across the public sector. They will be triaging. If it is appropriate to speak with a health professional or a nurse, then that will occur. As we bring on more staff to handle the volume of calls there will be public servants who will triage them in the first instance.

## **MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR**

### **Appropriation (Supplementary Appropriation for 2019-20) Bill 2020 (No. 10)**

**Madam SPEAKER** - Honourable members, I have received the following message from Her Excellency the Governor -

In accordance with the provisions of section 38 of the Constitution Act 1934 (25 Geo.V No. 94), the Governor recommends to the House of Assembly the payment out of the Public Account of the sum of four hundred and four million, eight hundred and eighty-nine thousand dollars (\$404 889 000) for the purposes set forth in the Appropriation (Supplementary Appropriation for 2019-20) Bill 2020.

C A WARNER  
Government House

### **Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020 (No. 11)**

**Madam SPEAKER** - Honourable members, I have received the following further message from Her Excellency the Governor -

In accordance with the provisions of section 38 of the Constitution Act 1934 (25 Geo.V No. 94), the Governor recommends to the House of Assembly the payment out of the Public Account of the sum of three billion, nineteen million, four hundred and thirty-eight thousand dollars (\$3 019 438 000) for the purposes set forth in Schedule 1 to the Supply Bill (No.1) 2020.

C A WARNER  
Government House

### **Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020 (No. 12)**

**Madam SPEAKER** - Honourable members, I have received the following further message from Her Excellency the Governor -

In accordance with the provisions of section 38 of the Constitution Act 1934 (25 Geo.V No. 94), the Governor recommends to the House of Assembly the payment out of the

Public Account of the sum of seventeen million, seven hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars (\$17 765 000) for the purpose set forth in the Schedule 1 to the Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020.

C A WARNER  
Government House

### **BRICKMAKERS POINT LANDSLIP BILL 2020 (No. 15)**

#### **First Reading**

Bill presented by **Mr Jaensch** and read the first time.

### **APPROPRIATION (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION FOR 2019-20) BILL 2020 (No. 10)**

#### **SUPPLY BILL (No. 1) 2020 (No. 11)**

#### **SUPPLY BILL (No. 2) 2020 (No. 12)**

### **TAXATION AND RELATED LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL 2020 (No. 13)**

### **FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (FURTHER CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2020 (No. 16)**

#### **First Reading**

Bills presented by **Mr Ferguson** and read the first time.

### **MOTION**

#### **Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

[11.20 a.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) (by leave) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That -

- (a) so much of Standing and Sessional Orders be suspended as would prevent:

the Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020 (No. 11); the Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020 (No. 12); the Appropriation (Supplementary Appropriation for 2019-20) Bill (No. 10), the Taxation and Related Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2020 (No. 13); the COVID-19 Virus Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2020 (No. 14); and the Brickmakers Point Landslip Bill 2020 (No. 15) from being dealt with at this day's sitting;

- (b) that for this day's sitting and Thursday, 26 March next, the House shall not stand adjourned at 5.25 p.m., and on Wednesday, 25 March, the House shall not stand adjourned at 2.30 p.m. and may sit past such times; and
- (c) unless otherwise ordered, at 6 p.m. today the House shall stand suspended until 10 a.m. Wednesday, 25 March and, further, that at 6 p.m. tomorrow, the House shall stand suspended until 10 a.m. Thursday, 26 March.

Madam Speaker, I seek to disentangle some of the meaning in my motion which has been drafted for me by our beloved Clerk. From the outset, I want to say just how much the Government appreciates the cooperation and diligence of everybody in this Chamber during these testing times. We are working together to get the best outcome for our community, protecting people's health and making the decisions that need to be taken.

We are mindful of the number of current circumstances, and we need to acknowledge that we do not have full knowledge of what the future sitting arrangements will be for this parliament. As much as possible, we are seeking to maintain the workings of our parliament while also protecting against a circumstance where we may need to take a prolonged break for social distancing or for other reasons. We want to be as prepared as possible.

The Government has prepared the legislation that I have named in the motion. I will note that a number of those bills have now been tabled. The one bill that has not been tabled is the bill that I named as the COVID-19 Virus Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. That is still a work in progress and it will not be debated this day, but we will keep members informed of the progress of that bill. As soon as it is completed, and I believe it may even need to be informed by tonight's National Cabinet meeting, we will keep members informed about that.

It is intended that we will continue each day with the list of business. Given the accelerated nature of considering this bill, if there is a need for members to take a briefing, the Government is prepared to suspend the House for a short period of time for questions to be asked and answered and then resumed. We seek to be as cooperative as possible to ensure that while we are putting extra haste into the process of considering legislation, that nonetheless, the sorts of issues that members would want to be considered are able to be considered. That is covering the field.

It would also be our intention to be aware that the other House is also accelerating consideration. This morning, they are considering legislation on suspension that has come from our House. Both Houses are working together. On our Wednesday and Thursday, we will need to be mindful of the progress of legislation in the Legislative Council and not be able to adjourn our House until they are absolutely signed, sealed and delivered.

Again, thank you and I commend this motion to the House.

[11.25 a.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I echo the sentiments of the Leader of Government Business regarding the cooperation and willingness to work together to respond to the extraordinary times that we find ourselves in. We support the motion.

I foreshadow that we would seek a small and short adjournment or suspension. Whilst we have seen four of the bills this morning, the supply (No.2), supply (No. 1), the appropriation bill and the taxation and related legislation amendment, we have seen a second reading speech, the clause notes

and the fact sheets, I have not yet had a chance this morning to read the full content of the bills. I seek to take half an hour to double check and to cross reference to ensure that good process is followed, that we do allow the time.

We appreciate the briefing on these bills that we received from Treasury yesterday. It was very informative and done very straight. We really appreciate the work of Treasury in responding so quickly to these circumstances and in trying, as best as possible, to deal with the scope of the problem that we are facing.

We agree with the motion to minimise contact, to minimise the work that is done in this room to allow the state government to get on with the work that they need to do and that we can get out of here. We support the motion.

[11.27 a.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, we are comfortable enough with the Notice of Motion that has been put by the Leader of Government Business. I acknowledge that we are all in a state of almost stunned disbelief at the speed with which this pandemic is changing every aspect of the lives of Tasmanians and indeed this parliament.

We accept what Mr O'Byrne has said about the need for a bit of extra time to have a look at the significant package of bills that was tabled this morning. Again, I thank Mr Ferrall and Mr Lennon, particularly, and Mr Finch for the briefing yesterday from Treasury and Finance.

I do not see any skulduggery in any of these bits of information. I take on board what you have said, minister, after our conversations yesterday about the COVID-19 emergency response bill not being debated today but being debated tomorrow. Minister, can I get clarification that once the House has dealt with the supply bills, the supplementary appropriation bill, and the taxation and related amendments bill, we will adjourn today? We are not sitting up to 6 p.m. and filling the rest of the day with other bits of legislation?

I recognise that the COVID-19 emergency response bill will be further tailored after tonight's National Cabinet meeting. I urge the Government to make sure that within that emergency response bill there are provisions, for example, for tenants, so that we can have some protection for tenants from evictions and from rent increases. The same concern needs to apply to small businesses and sole traders.

I thought that the Premier's use of the word 'hibernation' this morning was very interesting: to try to put businesses into hibernation so that they are ready to kickstart again when we are through this.

[11.30 a.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I also support this motion to suspend as much of the Standing Orders as we need to, to get straight to business. I recognise and appreciate Mr O'Byrne's comments regarding needing a little more time to read through these bills. I have actually had the chance overnight and this morning to go through them.

I want to raise a very brief point and question which is about how we are going to go forward in this place. We have done a great job at making do with suspending as much of the Standing Orders as we need to but I suspect we are looking at a long-range challenge around how we run things. I am quite concerned, as are others, to make sure that we do our utmost to ensure

representative democracy continues. That is going to require flexibility, more use of technology, and leadership across that part of how we operate together.

I was able to raise this in the briefings and it is something we will no doubt speak of during the debates on these bills. I wanted to get that on the record. It is something I have been really open about. I believe we are capable of doing it. We are asking others to think about working from home, working remotely and those sorts of things. I would like to see a plan develop and emerge for that. It is very important for the people of Tasmania to see that we are acting in an agile and intelligent way, still able to connect to our constituents and have the important debates that we need to have.

That is my contribution on this motion. I am content with people needing extra time to go through things in detail. That is very important and I look forward to making a further contribution on the bills.

[11.32 a.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Speaker, if I may, on your indulgence, respond briefly. I thank contributors on this motion. I can make no claims about the contents of the COVID-19 emergency bill; that obviously is with the Premier. He is carefully considering advice and that will be provided to members as soon as it is finalised to give members the maximum opportunity to consider it, given that the normal two-day maturing period is being waived as a result of the motion I am asking the House to agree to.

In response to Ms Ogilvie, we do not know exactly the trajectory of this disease in our community. We do not know what level of compromise there may be to the operations of this House. We intend and wish to come back on 28 April after this sitting week, but if circumstances and advice would be that we should not, we will not. We just need to be agile in that respect. I again thank people for their contributions and let us get on with it.

**Motion agreed to.**

## **SUSPENSION OF SITTING**

[11.34 a.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the House do now suspend.

**The House suspended from 11.34 a.m. to 12 noon.**

## **APPROPRIATION (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION FOR 2019-20) BILL 2020 (No.10)**

### **Second Reading**

[12.00 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

I am taking carriage of these bills on behalf of the Treasurer.

Supplementary appropriation bills are a well-established part of annual budgetary processes. They reflect the continuously changing financial environment that is faced by the Government and the important decisions that the Government is required to make to implement its policies and support the Tasmanian community.

As all members are well aware, in the current budget year we have been faced with a number of challenges. We are currently responding to the COVID-19 pandemic while also seeking to support the Tasmanian community and our vital business sector. We have faced bushfires that have required the allocation of resources to also ensure that the damage they cause to our environment, property and community is minimised. Demand in our hospitals has remained at high levels.

All of these challenges require the allocation of funding that was not foreseen at the time of the preparation of the 2019-20 Budget last year.

The Appropriation (Supplementary Appropriation for 2019-20) Bill 2020, therefore, seeks approval to appropriate additional funding in the 2019-20 budget year of \$404.9 million. Of this funding amount:

- \$225 million is required to meet additional expenditure that was included in the 2019-20 Revised Estimates Report. This includes \$118 million to meet demand in the Tasmanian Health Service, \$24 million to meet costs associated with new public sector wage agreements, \$16.3 million in increased infrastructure expenditure and \$10 million to meet bushfire fighting costs;
- \$1.4 million is required to implement initiatives that the Premier detailed in his recent state of the state address, including funding of \$500 000 for Tourism Tasmania, \$300 000 for emergency housing brokerage and \$370 000 for bushfire-related initiatives; and
- \$18.5 million is required to implement initiatives in the economic stimulus package. As members would recall, key elements of this package to be delivered this year include \$12 million in maintenance works, \$1 million to organisations that will support vulnerable people, and \$1 million for accommodation support for frontline workers and those who need emergency accommodation.

In addition to these priority funding areas, the bill also includes a further \$10 million, over and above the \$10 million included in the 2019-20 Revised Estimates Report, for bushfire costs. This amount reflects the most recent estimate of costs for the full year.

Finally, the bill also includes a provision of \$150 million to Finance-General to meet potential costs associated with further action required to be taken by the Government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This amount is in addition to any funding available through the Treasurer's Reserve.

The secretary of Treasury has provided briefings to the Leader of the Opposition, Leader of the Greens and the Independent member for Clark to provide further background information in relation to this bill.

The Government is committed to allocating the resources required to support the Tasmanian community now and providing capacity to deliver further support, should it be required. In recent years the Tasmanian economy and the budget position has gone from strength to strength and this now provides a strong foundation on which we can face the current challenges.

I commend the bill to the House.

[12.04 p.m.]

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I indicate at the outset that we will be supporting the smooth passage of the Appropriation (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill, Supply Bill (No. 1), Supply Bill (No. 2) and the Taxation and Related Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. I propose to only get to my feet once through the passage of these bills to make some comments, so in your response, perhaps you could answer a couple of questions that I want to progress through this.

We are in extraordinary times. The impact of COVID-19 has only just started to bite. We have seen stockmarkets around the world collapse between 30 per cent and 40 per cent. That is the tip of the iceberg - values lost, costs lost, communities, and businesses and industries impacted. There is no corner of our society that has not been impacted by this virus today. The impact will be felt for weeks, months and years to come.

We have seen responses across the world. We have seen central banks in more than 50 countries cut interest rates in a response to try to strengthen their economies. We know particularly, and Tasmania has seen this more acutely than many communities across the world, that the tourism and travel industries have become significantly impacted. As to our trading partners, particularly China, we rely very highly on them. In the Chinese market, industrial production fell by 13.5 per cent in the first two months this year. We know that the waves of the pond will reach every industry in our community.

We are in the most extraordinary of times. Some people have compared it to a world war, or the Depression. I think it is both of those things. This is the most existential crisis our world has faced, not only in the living memory of people in this room, but when you start to look back into the ages it is hard to find a comparison, given the interconnectedness of our global economy in terms of trade and human relations. Whilst some people say we are better prepared with technology to respond, and I think that is absolutely right, we are so co-dependent between countries in terms of trade and commerce that this virus will have such an impact.

I know many people have been waiting for this moment, not so much for a pandemic, but they have been waiting for the moment where people are reminded about the importance of government in terms of the delivery of trusted services - health, education, welfare and support across the whole social safety net. There are people over many years who have believed that the private sector and the market can produce best outcomes for people, but it is times like this that remind people of the importance of having a government delivering public services in a manner that supports the community across all corners, not just in a narrow cast delivery.



Government now is essential. It is the only organisation in this community globally and governments need to work together across not only states but across international borders to respond to this crisis. It is so important that governments are provided the resources by their parliaments to respond to what is the biggest existential crisis in my lifetime and in generations.

**Ms O'Connor** - It's not dissimilar to global heating; it's just happening a lot faster. Global heating is also an existential crisis; it will just take longer to wreak utter havoc.

**Mr O'BYRNE** - I do not disagree with you, but this is about the role now the public services have to play. Unfortunately, policy makers over a number of electoral cycles and governments at state and federal level have, by virtue of their policy, undermined the capacity of governments to respond. All of these things in terms of public discourse and public policy are a pendulum. This is a pendulum swing which reminds people that the fundamental importance of governments is to look after each other, to make sure that our communities can get through safely, not only socially, not only environmentally but from a health and welfare basis, not only personally, your personal health, but the health of the economy.

This is the FDR moment, globally. This is the moment where political leadership is required to spend the money, to invest in key essential government services to keep people safe, to keep people healthy. It is the moment to use the leverage of a government to invest in the economy. It is not about stimulus. We should not be talking about a stimulus. This is a support and recovery program. This is the time for big government - and 'big government' not in a pejorative sense - but big government to re-enter the field, to play its role that it has played in many times of crisis to get people through this.

With those opening comments and the context within which we work, I will say broadly that we support the measures in the bill to not only appropriate extra money to be able to spend it as and when needed. I do say that I think we may not be doing enough. There may not be enough money there. When you look at some of the dollars that are being allocated, they are not small amounts. We gather that, but the depth of the crisis that we will face in weeks and months to come will mean extraordinary measures will be required.

I will commit to the Government that if you need to come back for more, if you need to get the parliament to approve extra money to respond to the needs of our community, the Labor Party will be here waiting to pass those measures. We know the private sector is collapsing. As we see across the community, we saw companies make the toughest of decisions yesterday. We know people have been losing their jobs for the last week and a half already, and we know the decisions yesterday have had a wide impact.

We have seen the lines outside Centrelink offices, which again is another reflection on the important role in a social democratic society to have a proper, functioning welfare system. To have people not be able to access the offices, having websites crash because they have not built the capacity to respond, yes, it was an incredible peak but we have not seen such scenes since the 1930s. It is incumbent on government to have the capacity and the resources to respond to the needs of the community. The money that we are talking about today, at a state level, will go some way in supporting public servants and government offices in responding to the needs of the community. I forecast there will be a need for more and we will be here to support you in seeking more funds, if required, to respond to the needs of the community.

The tourism and hospitality industry had a woeful day yesterday and it is going to be worse today. It will be worse tomorrow. It will just get harder for them and we know that they are the first domino to fall. Sadly, they are the first domino to fall to the real and brutal day-to-day economic results of this pandemic and the economic impact on our community. Our heart goes out to those industries, those workers and those families who rely on those jobs.

It is a fundamental re-think about how our economy is organised now and the safety nets that we need to put in place so that people can have a civilised and dignified life. We do not want to see the depravities that we saw in the 1930s in the wastage, the human wastage, and the scrap heap that so many individuals and families were thrown on. This is an extraordinary time and it is a reminder about the importance that we have as legislators to support governments in making fundamentally important decisions to get people through this.

We do not want to have a return to Fascism. We do not want to have a return to societies where people feel so disconnected and so unsupported by their governments that they turn to extreme ways. This is not being hyperbolic. When you look at the lessons in history of when people feel like they have no choice, feel like they have no ability to be appreciated by society and conduct their lives in a decent and respectful way, they resort to extreme results. We do not underestimate the impact this is having on people.

The importance of governments to have the resources not only to intervene in the market where there is a market failure - and there is a failure of the market now - but to intervene and to be bigger and stronger in their response is never more needed than we are seeing today and will no doubt see when governments make decisions in the coming weeks and months.

The three bills, the supplementary appropriation bill, \$225 million required to meet additional expenditure that was included in the RER and \$118 million for the Health Service, that is a tremendous investment. The \$1.4 million associated with the state-of-the-state speech, the \$18.5 million required for the economic stimulus package, we also support. In addition to the priority funding areas, the bill includes a further \$10 million over and above the \$10 million included in the RER for bushfire costs. My question to the minister would be - and I know it is very early days - but if the minister or the minister for Emergency Services could by way of initial response advise how it is proposed to be spent. What kind of measures have been put in place, given some of the challenges that we will be facing? Again, the \$150 million to Finance-General, we believe it is in discussions with the Treasury department and the secretary and, again, I will put on the record our thanks for the briefing and for the manner in which it was conducted yesterday. I will flag that it may not be enough.

In terms of Supply Bill (No. 1) Supply Bill (No. 2) - completely appropriate in terms of the access to more money for the Government to respond to emerging needs. Regarding the process of pushing back the state budget and allowing the Treasury and the Government to access supply and funds appropriately for the period, we do not know what is ahead and when this House will come back and when the budget will be delivered. The bill that outlines the appropriation to allow Government to continue, and I have been listening to the podcast of 11 March about the politics of this, the passing of supply in the federal government and Whitlam years. It is a distraction but it is a fantastic podcast. It reminds us that the Labor Party believes in the importance of allowing the government, whether we like them or not, to do the work they need to do. We will not block supply to effect a political outcome. We support the process in allowing you to have the money to get through until at least the end of the year. It is a good podcast. I recommend it. I reckon people will have more time to listen to more podcasts over the coming weeks and months.

Regarding the Taxation and Related Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, in three parts, dealing with apprentices, dealing with the payroll tax waiver and also the First Home Owner Grant. The First Home Owner Grant and support for apprentices are welcomed. For the industries that employ apprentices, particularly the building industry, that waiver is important, although I am concerned for the short-term future of that industry and their ability to get access to products and to be able to work in a way which will ensure that the economy is strong. From the Labor team, our thoughts and best wishes go to all industries but particularly those that are impacted by the knock-on effect of this virus in a whole range of industries.

The payroll tax waiver bill outlines the powers of the minister to make directions. It talks about the interrelation and the hierarchy of decision making between the minister, the Director of Public Health, Health and the Commissioner of State Revenue. It might be of assistance to *Hansard* if the minister could talk through the decision-making process and whose responsibility is what. The bill does outline that but it would assist people to explain that clearly so that people reading the debate can understand which person makes which decision at which point of time. I know it ultimately comes back to the minister but there might be some confusion between the three roles, so perhaps the minister could clarify that in his comments.

I know that the bill gives the minister the ability to define who gets access to that payroll tax waiver but in your speech, minister, you specifically refer to youth employees and businesses in the hospitality, tourism and seafood industries and other small to medium-sized businesses impacted by the virus. It would give people some peace of mind if you would provide comments on where you think it will be impacted and where you think that those payroll tax waivers might apply.

A number of gyms and most hairdressers are small and do not get access to the exemption, or they do not pay payroll tax because of their size, but there are some chain gyms and larger healthcare and hairdressing companies that may click over into that. They are not mentioned here. It may give them peace of mind to get some comments from the minister to ensure that those businesses that are indirectly but directly impacted by the virus are able to seek assistance through this package.

I worry by naming industries that you narrow it down and there may be an outcome for small to medium businesses in Tasmania that may not get access to that because they feel either that they are excluded or they are not mentioned in the minister's second reading speech, so it would be of benefit to them and the broader business community for the minister to expand on his second reading speech in terms of the businesses he feels this initiative is designed to support. That would be of great assistance.

In conclusion, in dealing with the four bills, we support the Government in its action to do whatever it takes and to spend as much money as reasonably expected to respond to the devastating impact on our community and our economy that this virus will wreak. It is a reminder of the importance of government making good decisions on behalf of its community and not leaving it to others to resolve. It reminds us that government is here to ensure a functioning society and community and, fundamentally, that is about giving due respect. Working people and people who rely on government services deserve that at least.

[12.23 p.m.]

**Ms O'CONNOR** (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Deputy Speaker, on the way to work this morning we drove past the Centrelink offices in Hobart and as it is with Centrelink offices right around the country, the queue was stretching all the way down Barrack Street. It was deeply confronting. These are Tasmanians who were employed a week ago, who maybe a month ago

thought their jobs were secure and were making plans for the future. We are talking about tens of thousands of our fellow Tasmanians.

It reinforces the vital need for us all to work together and that we are all in this together. It is my hope that in some ways this pandemic is bringing people closer together from a safe physical distance. I am seeing all sorts of random acts of kindness. When you walk down the street people hold your eyes and look at you and there is that sense of human connection, because we cannot touch each other any more for a little while. It is so shocking. I think that is where we all are. It happened so fast, so ruthlessly, and here we are.

The Greens will be supporting these four bills that have been urgently tabled today for debate. I will make a few comments on each of them as a whole and ask a few questions of the minister on the way through.

Mr O'Byrne is absolutely right. What this situation brings home to us is the vital importance of government in keeping people safe and protecting their health and wellbeing. After decades of rampant conservatism and neoliberalism, undermining funding in our public services and public institutions and telling us that the market will take care of everything, here we are, turning to governments of all political stripes, in some cases desperately turning to them, for a sense of security and hope for the future. It is a bit like socialism has sashayed back into the room because now we are in a situation where government is having to invest in keeping people safe and doing what it can to look after businesses, to keep businesses in hibernation, until we get through this.

I do not believe parliament has ever before dealt with so many uncertainties. At every layer of every aspect of our economy and society, and our democracy, we are dealing with profound uncertainty. It requires of us all to work closely together, to respect each other, to engage in those random acts of kindness and to keep that social connection going.

I have read things about landlords cutting their rents by 20 per cent. I have heard many stories of people paying it forward to their favourite small business. I was talking to the owner of the Lansdowne Café the other day. One of his regular customers, who is a climate scientist, rang him up and said, 'I can't come in for a while but I love your breakfasts. Could you please give me your bank account so I can deposit the cost of my breakfast every morning with your café?'. I think it was Mr Shelton in this place the other day who said this pandemic is making good people better and bad people worse.

As a parliament, I sense that we are all determined not to leave any Tasmanian behind in the weeks and unknown months ahead. I believe that the social contract between government and the people nationally and here is being rewritten. There will be a need for much more openness and transparency as we go forward. We will need to remove political acrimony and point-scoring from everything we do. We will need to be constantly reminding ourselves of the critical value of our public servants. I know that across agencies many people are working from home, which presents its own challenges. It will impact on productivity. Constantly throughout the day I, and I am sure many Tasmanians, think about the people working in our health system. They are a high risk group of people and we owe them the most enormous debt of gratitude.

Before I go into the detail of the bill I cannot, in all conscience, not raise the issue of the differences in the way some employers have treated their loyal staff. For 40 years, the Farrell family has done very well from Tasmania. It has made billions and billions of dollars out of this island. It has taken money out of the pockets of some of our poorest people and it has corrupted our

democracy. The image I cannot get out of my mind after yesterday is the picture of Greg Farrell before the last state election with Federal Group employees standing behind him while he was seeking to coerce people, including his own staff, to vote a particular way and saying that their jobs were threatened by the policies of the Labor Party and the Greens. Yesterday, at midday, what did they do? Bang on the knock when the restrictions came in, Federal Group sacked 1500 Tasmanians.

This is a family that, according to the BRW Rich List, is worth around \$745 million. They sacked those people who stood by them before the last election, straight away - 12 o'clock on the knocker, 1500 jobs gone. There is only one word for that: 'betrayal'; absolute betrayal of those employees and of this island and its people. To be honest, I wish the Farrells would just bugger off back to Sydney.

We are dealing with four pieces of legislation today and I also thank the Treasury and Finance officials for our briefing yesterday. It was a very concise briefing, very straight-talking. This is our understanding of bills that we only saw this morning, which as responsible legislators in here makes us a bit uneasy. But these are times when everyone is feeling terribly uneasy.

The first of the Treasury and Finance bills that we are taking through today is the supplementary appropriation bill which gives the capacity for the Government to maintain expenditure and extra expenditure until June. It covers the state-of-the-state announcements of \$1.4 billion; it provides the funding for the first economic stimulus announcement and that is funding in hard money, if you like, of \$18.5 million out of a total stimulus package of \$420 million. It makes clear that a large part of the first stimulus is no interest, low interest loans. Businesses are going to need a lot more than that in order to come out of hibernation with any chance of restarting.

We look forward to the second set of stimulus measures. I encourage the Premier and the minister to remember that we are going to be dealing with people who are at risk of homelessness. We are going to be dealing with people who are elderly and living alone in the community who may be extremely isolated. We need to respond to people independently living with disability in the community who are heavily dependent on a carer workforce. We already know there are impacts as a consequence of COVID-19 transmission prevention measures on our care workers and some of the restrictions that have been put in place in order to protect their health and wellbeing. There will need to be a suite of socially protective measures in the second stimulus package.

In passing, I will say the Commonwealth Government, the Morrison Government, missed a real opportunity yesterday in not providing for a living wage. That is why there are queues outside Centrelink, for heaven's sake. We are now in a situation where we are treating everyone in this country as a job seeker when really they are job waiters. They are waiting for things to return to some semblance of normality. Of course, we do not know when that will be. If ever there was an argument for a living wage, for a universal basic income, it is here and it is now. We have had an acknowledgement from the Commonwealth that Newstart is unliveable but we do need to have a conversation about a living wage for people.

This first bill makes an extra allocation to Finance-General of \$180 million. Is that correct?

**Mr Ferguson** - Yes.

**Ms O'CONNOR** - Thank you. We acknowledge that our own state revenues will be impacted, that there will be declines and, in some cases, massive declines of revenue for conveyancing and stamp duty. There may need to be provisions made by Government for the relief of some of those

other duties and fees. We have seen the Western Australian Government move to put a freeze on payments such as rates, electricity, registration costs. These are measures that will have to be adopted down here.

We acknowledge that the Treasurer's Reserve will decline unless it is topped up. It is my understanding that the state's cash position is pretty good now but it will decline in the months and years ahead because these financial impacts will be cumulative.

I acknowledge that the extra provision in this legislation of \$150 million to Finance-General will help the Government to respond to unforeseen costs that come about as a result of this pandemic and the Government's need to respond to keep people safe.

The second bill is the Supply Bill (No. 1). I have a few questions for the minister relating to the appropriations. This is the bill that makes sure that services can continue to operate between 1 July and the end of this year because we will not have a state budget in June as originally projected. This has appropriations to agencies, and I am sure there is a very straightforward explanation for this, minister. We did have the time this morning to have a look at the forward Estimates for the agencies for 2021 as they were in the last budget and the appropriation in this supply bill.

There are some agencies where you can see that the appropriation for the next six months of operation is not 50 per cent of their forward Estimates allocation. There are some really concerning ones in here. Family violence, for example, in the Department of Communities Tasmania. The original allocation across the forward Estimates was \$8.87 million and I hope the minister will explain why only 26 per cent of the forward Estimates allocation for family violence is being covered in this supply bill.

We are seeing some figures that work the other way. For example, in housing, disability and community development there is 81 per cent of the allocation provided for in the second half of this year, that veterans, for example, have been allocated only 16 per cent of their full year's provision, and an extra 72 per cent for obvious reasons for Finance-General. The Health budget sits right on 50 per cent and it is very clear to us all that the Health budget will continue to grow over the course of the next year at least.

I wonder why of all the agencies within government and the divisions within agencies, the Department of Resources in State Growth is receiving 93 per cent of its allocation in the second half of this year, the first half of the next financial year. The original allocation for Resources was \$20 303 000 and they have been provided with \$18 804 000 under this supply bill. That seems an extraordinarily generous provision in a time of pandemic when we need to be sure we do not leave anyone behind. We are sure to have a freeze on evictions in place and a rent freeze so people are not facing spikes in their rental costs, yet this supply bill gives Resources in the Tasmanian Government 93 per cent of its full-year allocation. We have Racing being given 91 per cent of its full-year allocation, which might be easily explainable by the way the grant money rolls out the door. That is fine. Is that the same explanation for Resources? I look forward to your response.

The Heritage unit in DPIPWE is receiving 135 per cent of its full-year allocation across the forward Estimates and we need to understand why Heritage is receiving the best part of another \$2 million in the first half of this year. I see that there is an understanding there will be impacts on Education and Training in State Growth with 58 per cent of its full-year forward Estimates allocation provided for in this supply bill. Minister, as you are aware, we are in here working

cooperatively and taking much on trust, as we have to, but it is a bit hard to fathom why the supply bill has some of the allocations it does.

The second supply bill provides for the operation of the House of Assembly, the Integrity Commission, Legislative Council, Legislature-General, Office of the DPP and Office of the Governor so that we can keep those vital institutions of government and democracy functioning.

The final bill is the legislation that extends the First Home Owner Grant for two years, provides payroll tax relief to the hospitality and seafood sectors, and a payroll tax rebate. This bill gives power to the Commissioner of State Revenue to do whatever is necessary to implement an audit by the minister, so again we are seeing all sorts of shifts of responsibility and power in this very difficult period.

Our questions relate primarily to Supply Bill (No. 1) and why the decisions have been made in the way they have.

I close by making an observation about what are 'essential services'. We can glean from the Premier's response to questions this morning that Tasmania is likely to face more severe measures and some of those will be much stronger 'stay at home' messaging for the broader population. We have already seen the closure of pubs, clubs and restaurants and other hospitality ventures. Interstate and overseas in jurisdictions where they have gone into general lockdown, businesses that are regarded as essential services include pharmacies and supermarkets. Obviously there is a level of risk associated with going into a supermarket during a time of pandemic and I trust that the supermarket companies will manage those risks in order to keep people safe and well.

I know this is going to sound a bit hippy, but nurseries are really important. We are going into a period of social dislocation and disconnection. Many people will be spending a lot more time at home and for mental health and wellbeing, the capacity to spend time in your own garden and potentially grow your own food will be really important. I just received a text from my best girlfriend in the world. She is a great gardener and was out this morning at one of the big chains and said all the seedlings are nearly gone. What is happening is that people are worried about food security so they are thinking about planting gardens. They are also starting to become aware that perhaps in modern life we are bit too dependent on food that is imported or brought in or arrives with an Uber driver, so we are seeing people in Tasmania going to nurseries and I am sure many nurseries will report this. I was at the nursery on the weekend and they said they were doing a roaring trade. We are likely to see there will be a real need for businesses like nurseries to stay open to some extent so that they can be part of that social resilience and mental health and wellbeing protections we put in place as a society.

I ask that in those conversations about 'what is an essential service' that we think outside the box a little bit. We are about to go into winter here in Tasmania and people will be spending a lot more time indoors and, as we know, that comes with potential risk for people such as women in violent relationships or children in dysfunctional homes. We need to have all sorts of protective measures in place for those Tasmanians. We need to think about connecting with each other somehow or another over the dark winter months, because this is going to be the darkest winter in Tasmania's history.

In closing, I thank the minister for doing his best under really difficult circumstances to get a pretty comprehensive package of appropriation, supply and taxation amendments legislation together and to working with us in good faith on this and simply to encourage the Government and

the Premier, given that there is uncertainty about when and how parliament will sit in the immediate future, there is much more scope here for openness and trust.

It is a bit like Mr O'Byrne said, 'Isn't this unprecedented times we are talking about trusting each other'. And who would have thought yesterday I would have looked into the Premier's eyes for solace and comfort, but here we are.

I encourage the Government to be more inclusive here. If there are big decisions that are being made and you want political backing, if you want to send that message to the community that we are all working together, please give us a call. That would be really important because there is not going to be much of an accountability mechanism in place through this place and a decent government will not exploit that. I do not think in these circumstances that this Government will exploit that. However, it would be good to have some structures in place to ensure we keep talking to each other in the best interests of the Tasmanian people who elected us to serve them, to look after them when they need to be looked after, and to work in their best interests, which I am certain every member of this place is absolutely unreservedly determined to do.

[12.51 p.m.]

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Deputy Speaker, what a difficult day and what a difficult time for all of us here in Tasmania.

These bills that are brought forward today are obviously necessary. They are evidence of a fast response. It is my understanding that it is likely that more will need to be done but providing what I call 'contingency' for our economy over the next months up until, as I understand it, October to December when we might see a new budget, is the right thing to do.

I also appreciate that it is a period where we are having to work within a context of the unknown and that there are many forks in this road that will come up in coming weeks, months, even in years. We will have to make strong decisions and the best decisions we can make with imperfect information and that is really what I see that we are doing today. It is a business decision in a sense but it does go to the heart of our state, our economy and our families.

Yesterday was a terribly hard day for many people. I have said in this House before, in my professional life I have always worked in small business and the private sector. I am an unusual sort of creature in that regard. My friends who are sole traders in the professions - the barristers, lawyers, architects - everybody who provides professional services have very much felt the hit of what has transpired over the last day or so.

Whilst adhering very carefully to social distancing protocols, I took the opportunity yesterday to reach out to many of the small businesses and the cafes, pubs and clubs, walking into people's restaurants as they were closing to ask what more we could do, to see owners who have spent lifetimes - these are friends of mine from school - we are all in our fifties. They have spent a long time building these businesses and to see them standing with looks of shock, pale and exhausted, and having to let staff go, was a devastatingly difficult day.

My team, who are superb, are now running fully remotely-based and digitally. Our office, probably like everybody else's, is inundated with requests for help which we are doing and we are working through that quickly. The categories of people who have reached out include business owners, including landlords who are in trouble too, small businesses, sole traders, international students many of whom lost their jobs yesterday as well. They are very worried. They are worried



about their visas. They cannot get home so we will be doing everything we can do to deal with that very quickly.

It is very positive that these moves have been made to provide some confidence, some contingency and some cash into the system. That is a baseline. That needs to happen.

The job losses have rocked everybody but what business owners are telling me - and I get about with them and speak to them by phone, Facebook and social media - is that they are able to go into hibernation if they can handle the rent payments. This is where the rubber is hitting the road for many of them. I have a full list which I am happy to provide. The rent payment issue is real. I know we have some large landlords who have consolidated retail tenancies. They no doubt will be looking at it as well because from their perspective business is going to have to re-emerge and they do not want to lose all their tenants either.

It may be that we need to interject some government conversation into what is traditionally a very private sector contractual arrangement between landlord and tenant. I understand that the federal government package, there is a \$20 000 amount that business can draw on, particularly these small businesses, but I am finding we are trying to coach people through the system to get them connected to that funding at both a state level and federal level. It is not happening fast enough. A week sometimes is too long in this situation.

I understand that we think the funds will be flowing in a fortnight, so what is a small business to do today? Do they just stop paying everybody? Do they try to do the right thing? For example, a business in Swansea did the right thing and refunded \$9000 worth of people's advance bookings.

The Tasmanian thing: we are very decent people but we are going to have to think about new models and new ways of dealing with these issues. We are not just in a state emergency; we are in a national emergency and it is a global emergency. There are two limbs to this. There is the health emergency and there is the economic emergency. Mr O'Byrne is quite right to say it is not a stimulus package; it is a survival package at the moment. We have to keep things going as best we can.

I am working with businesses, sole traders, everybody, families to say to them, let us hunker down and let us look at how we can protect your economic viability, not just as a business but as a family to re-emerge later. Many people now who have their economic settings set in a home sense, in a home base for a two-person income household are now on one income. This is going to dig deep into family scenarios as well but, again, good Tasmanians, all are saying everybody is prepared to do what it is going to take.

We do not know the full extent of where this will go but I have such confidence in our people and us being a plucky little island state that being able to pull together and work with each other and take the hits for the broader community benefit is absolutely in our DNA. That is what we will do.

I do have a degree of concern, and I will not overstate it, because we are here to get the job done and maybe we could work through lunch; I would be happy to do that if that is an option. I am not sure if we need to take a break, but I do have a degree of concern around how we ensure representative democracy and transparency of decision-making truly continues during this phase. I fully accept that there is a time for strength and decision-making and agile leadership and getting the dollars done. We all accept that.

At the same time, the strength of how we do things in our representative democracy is that we have that feedback loop with the people. We want to bring people with us and we need to hear what people need. It has to be a two-way communication flow and this House and the MPs in this place are really your front line of information gathering. It is not just the Government. It is all of us here. In every nook and cranny of the state, we are there talking to people and hearing what is coming forward. I would really like to think that we are able to continue that, no matter happens to this place.

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

**APPROPRIATION (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION FOR 2019-20) BILL 2020  
(No.10)**

**Second Reading**

**Resumed from above.**

**Ms OGILVIE** (Clark) - Madam Speaker, as I was saying, we will all have to find new ways of doing things, and the phrase 'needs must' is one we will be using a bit as we go along.

An issue we would like to see some attention be turned to in relation to how we move forward, particularly over the time of these contingency measures, is around capacity to run a digital democracy. That means there are some absolute requirements that people are going to need to make that happen. I will give a big call-out to all the telecommunications companies and thank them very much for keeping the show rolling. Without our communications capacity, life would be much more difficult. We have seen them step up time and time again in natural disasters, bushfires, et cetera, but we are seeing them continuing that business continuity to keep us connected. That is very important.

We will need to see some changes and times of crisis are times in which great innovation can happen, times when a generation that has gone along, as we have, with the way things have been. We have asked for more flexible working environments and more capacity to work remotely. We have asked for the big public service jobs to be disaggregated out of Canberra into the regions. These things can be done. Times of crisis are a moment, an inflection point, at which we can make things happen. We can trial new methods and new models. Tasmania has always been the pilot state. We can do things using our island advantage if we all work together. I love that phrase 'Team Tasmania' because that is truly how we are going forward together at the moment.

I have been giving some thought to the issue of how best to make sure we have a degree of normality around our parliamentary processes. I accept, as others do, that we are heading into the unknown somewhat in relation to this, but it is important that a degree of scrutiny and transparency continues. I thank the team for the briefing. I was very impressed with the good Tasmanian approach that people are taking and in this House the degree of trust that has to be there as a foundation for the decisions we are making very quickly and rapidly to ensure we put ourselves in the best place to re-emerge hopefully stronger and better from this crisis.

I was informed that there will be government reporting and Treasury will have a space on its website to report numbers, spending, et cetera. I have nothing other than a great deal of respect for

the people who run Treasury and that will be a very good addition to the kitbag in providing additional certainty and transparency to the people of Tasmania. If we come to a stage where we have to do parliament differently, I would like to see some thought go into what that might look like and how we convene. Even if we get to a stage where we might have to have digital question time, online meetings and those sorts of things, there is an upgrade in technology and capacity requirement to make those things happen.

I want us to make sure we stay as connected as we can to every individual Tasmanian, our population, not-for-profits and individuals. They will be best placed to know what they need and what people need in their areas to do, so we have to keep those conversations going, not just with government MPs but all of us in this place. I wish there were more but there are only 25 of us and every single person in this place fulfils a fundamentally important function in our democratic processes. I strongly urge everybody to continue on and if you need to, get assistance with your offices to get remote and digital working happening.

We have always had a strong consultation process around budgetary processes. I know we are going to, because we have to, push things out to a little later, but I wonder what processes around decision-making for the grant-making out of these contingency funds will be and how much input others will be able to have in those processes. It may be that we need to give thought to how we structure something that is more agile and able to be delivered statewide without being all in Hobart at the same time.

We are all about being practical and I certainly do not want to propose impractical solutions but I want all of our people to continue to be engaged in the process. I am calling on government as well and it would be no surprise to the digital minister that I am strongly of the view that we can be more agile and can do more around technology. We would love to see the Government step up and provide technological solutions to connect not just government with the people but the people with each other and provide a lead on how other businesses can do things effectively, at least in this interregnum period. That might require a little investment and some leadership. We can show leadership through this House and our own offices as well.

We have existing infrastructure across the state and very experienced engineers, technicians and telecommunications people and we have our cables to the mainland, so we are going to stay connected, so in one sense we are staying connected whilst we are physically disconnecting. A theme that has emerged in the last few days is that as we step back visiting from each other we can step forward with each other digitally speaking. Let us be kind to each other on social media. Let us put away some of that bad behaviour we have seen over the past few years where people have felt free to say what is truly on their minds without thought to how comments might be perceived by others.

We want to keep those interactions happening. My own family situation, as it will be for many others, is kids at school. We also have an elderly relative in difficult circumstances at their stage of life and we would truly like to spend more time with that person, for obvious reasons, but we are where we are and it is quite difficult for all of us. For some people connecting technologically can work, while for others it is a hard situation.

In relation to small business and business generally, professionals and sole traders, cash is king. I have had a chance to exchange notes and thoughts with Geoff Fader and I want to read a little of what he has to say around how we assist businesses to go into hibernation mode and re-emerge at an appropriate time. He says, and it is worth noting, that cash flow failure is the single largest cause

of small business failure. I know that some small businesses are running week to week. I spoke to one today at lunchtime and she was relying on the sales from last week to pay the rent this week. Her business is viable, but there is just not a lot of fat in the system. She is not running overdrafts, she is running a tight ship but it is week to week, so getting the funds into peoples' bank account next week would be really helpful and it is all hands on deck to make that happen. It will improve confidence because each one of these businesses has a couple of employees. They have had to let people go. They are really taking some serious hits and we just want people to feel confident that we literally have their back and that they will not end up in a much worse scenario owing a lot of money, whether it is back rent or for suppliers or traders. We can freeze those supply chains for a period of time. The last thing we want is for anybody to get into a situation from here where they lose a house. That would be a very devastating set of circumstances for that to occur.

As I have gone around town and on social media, as I chat to people online, I say to them, please reach out to your friends, particularly those who are stoic in nature. Say to them, 'are you really okay? Is there anything I can do for you?' Just try to dig a little deeper.

One of my colleagues commented before, a lot of analog people from the 1980s - and I am one - we should remember how to do that stuff. We have forgotten it a little bit because we were that little bit removed with the social media. The 1980s was a good time and it was before the recession and before those other things and we have lived through that. My generation has lived through all of that stuff. We have built some resilience. We understand that times can get tough and we can shrink down to survive as Tasmanians. We are good at that.

My family has been here six generations. We have been through the Depression era. Grandad building the road up the mountain, getting people working. We have done this before and I am confident we can do it again but I do want us to really reach out to people who might be all 'stiff upper lip' about things and less able to tell you what is really going on in their lives.

A couple of further comments from my communications with small business and Geoff Fader. For the survival of businesses, their need for money in has to be greater than money out. It is really that straightforward at the moment. We are dealing with some really difficult situations where people, right now, in their businesses and offices are deciding whether they can actually pay things or not. What to do about the lease. Where they even put a copy of the lease. We have some of that stuff going on.

I truly appreciate, and I said this also to the federal senators we have been working with, that the state government's package is big, good and strong and we see that from the federal government as well. We just have to make sure it is connected to people's bank accounts as soon as possible.

The deferral of government taxes at both the state and national levels, would be welcome. A few people have talked to me about deferral of GST collections, particularly people who are not employers, such as sole traders, professional service providers who see they have that big bill coming up soon. Can we defer that just to get them through?

In the main we are dealing with people who have trained to run their professions. They are not changing any time soon. They have houses and mortgages and kids and rent to pay and all of those things that we all have, or even starting out in their careers. They are not going to change careers soon. They do not have that sort of flexibility. We want to make sure that we have that in mind as well.

There is a great complexity to our working economy and currently those who are employed with salaries, particularly government salaries, are in a stronger position than others. We have asked one sector to take a big hit and they have taken it on the chin.

I strongly want to ensure that I do everything I can to raise their concerns as they come through to me. We would like to see a deferment of municipal rates and council rates. In the *Mercury* this morning there was some discussion about things that came out of the council but it would be difficult if we have 29 different sets of arrangements in deferrals, of possibilities of bills coming or not coming. The rates notices in Hobart literally arrived in the letterbox yesterday and the day before so those bills are sitting on the table. We would like to see a deferral of those. I invite the Government, if they can, to lead across councils to come up with an agreed solution - perhaps it is through LGAT - as to how we deal with those issues. I believe 29 different solutions and 29 council areas is going to be a little bit challenging.

Another question: could we please defer energy and water charges where these are government controlled? I recognise you are trying to run businesses as well but we are all in it together at this stage. I hope that as things emerge, and at the right time, those sorts of concepts will come on to the agenda.

I see that there is work going on with the banks at a federal level as well. It is interesting that the banks have been very quick to come out and talk about supporting businesses. At the end of the day we are all in it together. That supply chain in business goes right through and the banks have to look after their customers because we are so entwined and enmeshed with each other from a financial perspective.

We want to see employment maintained as much as possible but we are all truly devastated for everybody who has lost a job, or lost a business, in the last few days.

On a personal note, it is a very pavement-level discussion, I was coming to parliament this morning and I am making a habit of dropping in to get takeaways from different places. The other day I accidentally bought eight pizzas because I felt a bit sorry for them. They had them made and they were young people running that business. They had been running it for a long time. I know them. They are lovely. Went in there, there were not people in the business, and they had made the pizzas as per normal. My heart broke so we bought the pizzas and I made the kids eat as much as possible. Little acts of mad generosity, if you can, in the middle of it all.

I worry about our music teachers as well and anybody who is providing tutorial services and those sorts of things that they do from home. I am trying to encourage everyone I know to be able to do things by Skype. Luckily we are able to assist a little bit with the technology and to pay ahead. Pay small providers ahead, pay a month in advance if you can, pay a portion in advance if you can and we have certainly been doing that.

I have other scenarios in which we have families who have had to restructure what they do very quickly. One partner was perhaps in a riskier business, perhaps as a sole trader or professional services provider, that work has just dried up. The other partner has now had to step up and it has changed the family dynamic completely. There is discussion within families about school and education. My children are still at school. We have made that decision as a family but I am guided by my kids and about their levels of concern. I have had days where two have been happy to go and one has been scared to go. That is nothing to do with how the school is running it, or health and safety. That is about real human home-based parenting and those decisions around that.

We are concerned about the tradies and the subbies in particular. The ABN fellas and the family businesses where it is a husband and wife team. They are struggling as well but I am very pleased to see that the forward program of infrastructure work - and I think you call it screwdriver and paintbrush level work - is going to continue. Again, the concerns about the interregnum, the middle piece, the hibernation piece, is very live in many people's minds.

I have had many people reach out from the hospitality sector. I spoke to a woman yesterday who owns two restaurants in different areas and they just look in a state of shock and worry, pale faces. People who own their businesses are now sitting at the door of their business, making coffees to keep morale up. That is what they are doing and it is very brave of them to do that because many have had to let go people they love, their staff, their long-term staff. No matter how they are employed, as casuals or permanents or whatever it is, they love these people. Tasmanian businesses and the workforce are very stable. It felt as though they had to let some of their family go and now they are at the front door of their own restaurant making coffees to keep morale up. I feel it is important that as we go about town we keep a stiff upper lip in the old school way and keep morale up and are seen to be out there helping. Of course we should follow all the rules around social distancing but there is a level of normalcy we should try to keep going and continue.

I spoke this morning about increasing community-based testing. That is important. I have been a loud and strong advocate for Singapore-style ramped-up approaches. I have been banging on about that for a long time. I was pleased to see reported today in the paper that one of our very own from the University of Tasmania is in Singapore helping that place, and how proud we feel as a small island state of the quality of our people who are working internationally and getting those results. Big ticks for everybody who works at the university. I have another friend who is a professor at the university who is now teaching fully online, trying to teach from home. It is about getting that technology solution into place quickly so that students can keep working, and also making sure our international students are getting the help they need. I give a call-out to our federal members and senators, who have been good when we have escalated issues from our office, to help with all of that.

Representative democracy needs to go on because power comes from the bottom up. It is about grassroots. It is about the people of Tasmania letting us know how they want us to represent them and what the issues are that will come up. We still need great minds in leadership and great capacity and grit and determination and all of those things I spoke about this morning. Those models have to work and the contingency has to be there and we are lucky that we have that. We need to make sure that we are listening to individuals and realise it is not just all about money but also about human beings, confidence and the capacity of Tasmania to rebuild.

**Time expired.**

[2.53 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Speaker, this has been one of the better debates I have participated in and I have been a member of this House now for 10 years this month. We had to put off all of the global celebrations due to the current social distancing - pun intended - but we were not able to agree to defer my forty-sixth birthday yesterday.

**Madam SPEAKER** - Happy birthday for yesterday.

**Mr FERGUSON** - That went on undiminished - a day at work working for our state.

I appreciate the contributions of the shadow treasurer, the Leader of the Greens, and the member for Clark and acknowledge, for the benefit of readers of *Hansard* and viewers of our webcast, that parliamentarians have resolved to keep the debate to a minimum but not compromise the scrutiny that should and has been occurring. In so doing I acknowledge that members of parliament have all been given the benefit of briefings from Treasury, the free opportunity for parliamentarians in representing our state to seek answers to questions on detail. That all happened yesterday and this morning for members of the Legislative Council.

It is an unusual debate. It is unusual that four bills would have a cognate-style approach in the way we have conducted ourselves through the day. It is to be applauded because we are in unprecedented times and an unusual set of circumstances where this parliament needs to continue to function and it is functioning efficiently and professionally on the basis of the goodwill that has been extended from all quarters of the House. I really appreciate that and the Premier joins me in thanking members for their constructive approach. I will make some overview comments and then turn to questions that have been asked by members, and this is of course across the range of the package of four bills we are considering this afternoon.

I agree and strongly endorse the comments being made about the positives of the crisis, which are small in number but very meaningful and important to the way that families and communities work together. There has been talk about getting back to some of the basics of family life and the acts of kindness, the way that businesses have collaborated and supported each other, including businesses that have often and traditionally been competitors, and the way we have been reminded of that old-fashioned value of honouring our elders and thinking about our parents and our grandparents' particular needs during this time. It could be an older neighbour down the street or somebody we know who may be isolated from family support and are deserving of our extra attention during this time.

It is things like making decisions around helping people, and that while one might well be able to go through this because they are on regular public service wages and have confidence in knowing where their next pay cheque will come from, acknowledging that there are tens of thousands of other Tasmanians who do not have that luxury or privilege. I believe every member who spoke has acknowledged the pain and loss being experienced by many people as of 12 noon yesterday and in some cases prior to that.

Immense challenges are being faced by individual people, families and communities right now, and we are here to help them. We are all here - government, opposition, cross bench - with a task to help make it bearable for them and help create or influence the conditions so that this state can bounce back more quickly and strongly because of our health policies, our health approaches and following public health advice about how to reduce the chance of infections occurring in the state and how we can do the same for our business community to help them survive some very difficult rules that have been placed upon them.

I will spend a moment addressing the fact that the federal government has a major role here. This Government expects the federal government to play its role and, indeed, we have been constantly, particularly through the Premier and Treasurer, seeking to influence decisions of Canberra. I believe we have had some success there and the not one but two rounds of federal support and stimulus packages that have been announced including the most recent one of the weekend we strongly welcome. We feel that it is not just a cash splash, it is not just about getting money out the door, it is about helping people in the circumstances where it will provide meaningful assistance and no doubt there will be more to do.

The federal government announced that taking account of all arms of government \$189 billion as of 22 March was the sum total of government effort. I particularly want to mention the importance of the coronavirus supplement that has been provided to people who are existing recipients of the JobSeeker payment and people who find themselves unexpectedly eligible for and needing the JobSeeker payment. The extra \$550 per fortnight for six months is a clear signal that the Commonwealth understands large numbers of people need that payment quickly, even waiving the usual 13 weeks or three-month waiting period for eligibility on that, including for workers who are stood down but still technically have a job to go back to. These kinds of supports are material to family budgets right now and it is the perfect space for the Commonwealth to be appropriately playing its role as the social safety net provider of income support.

The direct cash payments to businesses are a real lifeline and it came as a breath of fresh air to many businesses which I spoke to on Sunday afternoon who were not even expecting such an arrangement. We feel that it is the right approach and has the right merits behind it. There is a limit to it for businesses that are under \$50 million turnover per year aggregate. We acknowledge that there will be some businesses that do not get that cash payment, the larger businesses. I might come back to that. Those direct cash payments into businesses because cash flow is king in a business. You may well even have a sense of viability about your business even when you might be choosing or required to close down your premises, you might feel that on paper, your income and your expenditure you might be able to just balance it out. I think somebody said hibernate. It was an interesting expression.

**Ms Ogilvie** - Yes, that was my question to the Premier this morning.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Yes, and you might well, but if you do not have the cash to pay the bills that are with you right now then you have a cash flow crisis. Those payments to business we see as vital enablers to at least support as many businesses as possible to remain viable for when this crisis moves into its recovery phase.

By making a direct cash payment through the pay as you go withholding system, we really are appreciative of that because in itself it is a direct incentive to a business to hold on to the workforce where they are able to do so.

There are businesses that will not benefit from that direct cash payment because they are above the \$50 million threshold. We are attuned to that. We are aware already that businesses that are paying payroll tax in Tasmania, they are businesses that we can provide support to in a different way to the way the Commonwealth is able to, or has chosen. We are examining those options, going forward, and as the Premier has made clear and as I have indicated this morning, the Government is looking at a further round of support and stimulus for our state.

I will now address questions that were asked during the earlier discussion. I appreciated Mr O'Byrne's remarks. I would beg to differ that this is the right amount for this time. We feel that it is, on the advice of Treasury and our departments. This is the right approach for now but we have been, and I certainly do not want to make a squabble of this, but we appreciate Mr O'Byrne's comments that if more was needed the Labor Party will stand ready to support that in the time if that were to occur, and if the Government was in that position. We appreciate the expression.

I was asked about the fire budget. I am advised that in 2019-20, the estimates of bushfire costs are as follows: they include \$11.6 million for aerial firefighting costs, \$3.2 million for firefighting



costs; and I am advised approximately a further \$5 million of other costs that are still being finalised for this current financial year.

Although it is not specifically in the notes or the bill, I was asked by Mr O'Byrne about the taxation bill and a reference to the building industry specifically. Perhaps Mr O'Byrne was also questioning industry generally, and its access to products. I am pleased to indicate that while there are going to be barriers in terms of access to products, particularly where businesses are seeking products that are not produced locally, there is a challenge particularly for overseas manufactured goods. As you see new markets coming back online, including, for example, out of China, I am at least able and pleased to be able to say that our freight and logistics supply chains do look quite favourable given our circumstances of an island state. I was able to speak with industry participants from freight and logistics last Friday. We were very pleased that our sea links still look quite favourable. Some of our export capability has diminished but there are still linkages that are functional and working, particularly across our ditch of Bass Strait between Tasmania and Victoria. There has been a remarkable effort there given other circumstances around waterfront disputes.

In Melbourne, there has been a hacking against Toll, which is effectively a global business, but the participants there are working quite well together and we are getting containers and trailers both directions, north and south, on Bass Strait right now. There have been some delays but those delays are now being reduced, which is pleasing.

**Ms O'Connor** - By interjection, and I am sure you are doing it, can I just check whether there is contingency planning in place around those freight corridors and what sort of planning? It sounded like there is a measure of uncertainty about everything.

**Mr FERGUSON** - The answer is 'yes'. In fact I am happy to take the interjection because all of Toll and SeaRoad and TT-Line, together with ANL out of Bell Bay, have been collaborating and helping each other with the freight task. It has been very pleasing. While the negative and the downside of the non-essential passenger restriction on the TT-Line, it has in fact freed up more deck space to allow TT-Line to help and assist with Toll's now diminishing but nonetheless overdue freight task on both sides of Bass Strait.

Mr O'Byrne asked me about the take-up of the scheme for young people. I have some information here. In 2017-18, 158 employers claimed rebates totalling \$2.75 million. This included annual adjustment payments that were made after 30 June 2018 and related to the 2017-18 financial year. The original budget was \$2.8 million. In 2018-19, 193 employers claimed rebates totalling \$6.1 million. This included annual adjustment payments that were made after 30 June 2019 and related to the 2018-19 financial year. There are claims for 2018-19 that are still being processed.

While the existing scheme is now closed for applications relating to youth employees, there will still be some rebate payments being made in relation to youth employees who entered the scheme prior to 30 June 2019. As of 2 March 2020, for the 2019-20 financial year to date which is probably what you were really asking, 188 employers are claiming under the scheme. In employee numbers, this equates to 1706 apprentices and trainees and 114 youth employees. Employers have claimed rebates totalling \$3.6 million for the 2019-20 year to 31 January 2020.

In the taxation and related legislation bill, Mr O'Byrne also asked how the amendments would work in practice, particularly in relation to the different characters that are mentioned - the minister, the commissioner and the Director of Public Health. I am happy to answer it now. It is smart to answer it now. I have the following advice: the amendments allow the minister to make a

ministerial order that waives the payroll tax liability of businesses that meet the criteria prescribed in the ministerial orders. The ministerial order will provide for the conditions announced under the Government's first stage Economic Stimulus Plan, including industry, businesses eligible for the payroll tax waiver, administrative processes to be waived and the period of the waiver.

The legislation also prescribes that a ministerial order can only be made if it is made before the one-year anniversary of the minister being notified by the Director of Public Health that the COVID-19 health emergency has concluded. It has that outside limit of one year post the notification. This provides the minister with the capacity to provide further payroll tax relief post the health emergency in response to economic challenges created by COVID-19. It is one year post the conclusion of the emergency period given by notification.

**Ms O'Connor** - What is the report back in accountability terms? Is it gazetted?

**Mr FERGUSON** - It will be gazetted and it will be reported in the normal budget.

**Ms O'Connor** - Or the mid-year financials? This is a really important point because we are actually giving the Treasurer enormous powers here, or you, in fact.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I have nothing further to add. It will be gazetted and it will be reported in the quarterly reports that Treasury ordinarily does. It will also be reported in the next budget.

The legislation then allows the Commissioner for State Revenue to do anything necessary to give effect to the ministerial order. The advantage of a ministerial order is that it allows the Government to quickly adapt to rapidly changing events created by COVID-19 so that the minister will be able to adjust the payroll tax waiver in a timely manner without further need to amend the legislation. I hope that is helpful.

The Premier has already indicated that he and the Government are giving mind right now to further supports which will be announced in coming days as they are finalised. The bill, while not being prescriptive around this at the moment, facilitates our first support package and if further concessions are being contemplated it would enable those, again with the usual disclosures and reporting being made.

Ms O'Connor claimed socialism was coming back into fashion. It was an interesting turn of phrase.

**Ms O'Connor** - You can call it what you like.

**Mr O'Byrne** - I think 'sashaying back into the room' was the exact phrase.

**Ms O'Connor** - Mr O'Byrne said, kick the door down and leave this to me.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Without wanting to join that debate or name-drop Khemlani too many times, I will just say that the Government has worked extremely hard to get the budget into a strong position prior to this emergency coming before us, and because we have a strong budget position we are able to do these important interventions while our economy is being massively disrupted by a microscopic germ.

**Mr O'Byrne** - Just a question about the scope of the payroll tax concession. I am not sure if you covered that in terms of which industries because you did name a few but there is nothing in the bill.

**Mr FERGUSON** - No, the bill does not name any.

**Mr O'Byrne** - But in your second reading speech you do. My point was, by interjection through the Chair, that it would be good to maybe fill that out bit, to give people a bit more confidence.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I understand, but you could ask the same question of any of the initiatives the Government may be considering as part of our next round of support and stimulus package. For now, the definitions we have provided in the first package are clear, and we have been very outspoken about those. The bill does not have quite that level of definition during the period of the emergency that provides a general power.

**Mr O'Byrne** - But the bill enables you to do it.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Yes, and we will certainly have more to say about that because mindful of the federal announcement at the weekend, we can see some opportunities here. We want to help businesses to survive because there have been a lot more businesses impacted than the ones we have mentioned in tourism, hospitality and seafood. Mr O'Byrne, I know you acknowledge that. We look forward to saying more about that subject and being as open as you would want us to be when that time comes.

We value our public institutions. We value the State Service. As a government we have demonstrated that by investing significant and record amounts into those institutions, but in the meanwhile we have also had to grow our economy and support the capitalist nature of businesses wanting to invest their own money, their own personal wealth, into a business which has risk and which has the opportunity to employ Tasmanians. We are now seeing a massive disruption to that, so without wanting in any way to enter into an ideological argument about this, we need to stongly support our public institutions and we can, we should and we need to support the vehicles that employ Tasmanians and that is the business community.

**Ms O'Connor** - Taxpayers contribute towards employing people as well.

**Mr FERGUSON** - I do not disagree.

Ms O'Connor also asked for an explanation as to why when you looked and did a basic bit of arithmetic around last budget's forward Estimates and compared those with the dollar amounts that are provided for in the supply bills - I acknowledge the point she is making and it is a reasonable question to seek an explanation for. In fact I feel that a similar kind of debate happened the last time we brought in a supply bill. My advice is as follows. Estimates for the 2020-21 supply are based on proportions of yearly expenditure spent in the first half of this financial year applied to the forward Estimate for 2020-21 in the Revised Estimates Report.

These Estimates can, for a range of reasons, vary considerably from what you would have expected from a straight 50 per cent split. One reason could be significant grant payments in the first days and months of the new financial year, especially non-government organisations which are usually reliant on grant funds from certain government departments but also Tasracing, so that may

account for a line item where it is a lot higher than 50 per cent, other differences in expenditure from year to year, including new and completing initiatives, and the third factor that is given to me for advice is other seasonal impacts. Treasury has done this in the best estimates of expected need for cash over the next six discrete months to calculate what is required in the supply bill for the first half of 2020-21.

**Ms O'Connor** - By interjection, minister, there are a couple of specific line items that I would like you to explain if you can. One is the 26 per cent allocation for six months for family violence and why Resources is receiving 93 per cent of its allocation in the first half of this year. Is that because there is more clear-felling and burning in the winter months? Also why has the Heritage line item an apparent increase in funding, not that anyone would begrudge more money going into Heritage?

**Mr FERGUSON** - While I do not have possession of those individual levels of granular detail for those particulars, the arguments I am making are to seek to satisfy you that Treasury has calculated what is required for business as usual and existing policy and parameters are being implemented for all of those divisions of government over the next six months. I am not being evasive but, for example, you did mention that Health was bang on 50 per cent. I think you might have said that Resources and racing you had singled out as being 80 to 90 per cent.

**Ms O'Connor** - No, 91 per cent to 93 per cent.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Thank you for that. While I acknowledge your calculation on family violence, there will be no diminution of effort whatsoever.

**Ms O'Connor** - With respect and in the spirit of cooperation, what we know is that in this time ahead there will be more risk to women through these confined times and family violence funding will invariably need to increase, so why is there only 26 per cent in the first six months?

**Mr FERGUSON** - Ms O'Connor, I totally respect the question. The answer is the same. There will be no reduction of effort. In all cases, without seeking to tweak or alter up or down individual amounts, Treasury has based predicted funding needs per month on the pattern that was apparent in the current financial year 2019-20, so that is the pattern of funding required. You will also note that taken as a whole, the supply bill is more than 50 per cent of the current financial year. There is a buffer in there and to further assure you, where it turns out not to be as accurate as desired or there might be a change in business that needs to be dealt with, agencies can make internal transfers to ensure that business can continue as needed. Even if there were the need for increased resource, it could be done and, additionally, even between agencies transfer can be made. If that were not enough, there is the Finance-General Fund, which you zeroed in on, with a significant resource there to ensure we are adequately covered, and I still have not mentioned the Treasurer's Reserve.

I totally respect the question and because we have spent so long on it I intend to go back and have a further look and if there is anything further to share with you I will do that.

**Ms O'Connor** - Thank you.

**Mr FERGUSON** - Ms Ogilvie also raised some important points and I know she spoke on behalf of many people, including those who are unable to speak to this bill today, about businesses doing it tough. That is absolutely acknowledged. We have to thank the business community because if you want a job you need a business to be successful and growing and to be in a position

where they can employ you with confidence. I do not want to say there might well be one or two that are not, but I am not aware of any businesses that have not followed the strict health advice, particularly from yesterday. I am not personally aware of any. There may be one but I am not aware of it. The Premier shared his heartache today and that would have been extremely stressful. For some it would have felt like a very difficult decision and in other respects they will have felt that they had no say in it all. It was made for them. They just got on and did it and while one employer was singled out, the simple reality is that vast swathes of our economy were shut down yesterday. It was in obedience to the new rules.

How people are managing their human resources, that is a very difficult judgment for them to make. Some employers, understandably, have had to let their staff go. Some employers have found it possible to continue with their staff, or a smaller number, and still others have chosen to stand down staff which means that they are without work and without wages. In some cases, for example, for people who do not have any annual leave or long service leave owing, they have technically kept them on as an employer with a hopeful view that they can be re-engaged when we get through this.

I take my hat off to all of them and I know you do too, Ms Ogilvie and Mr O'Byrne. We are not in that position as members of parliament. We are here in trust for the community. They have elected us to be here but our personal circumstances are far more secure during this time. Our attention to their needs is critical. I appreciate the time that we have spent reminding ourselves, each other, and people outside this Chamber who are listening or reading, we just need to drive that point home. I really admire all speakers who made the important point about supporting our local businesses. There should be absolutely no need for online overseas retailing at this time. As much as we are able, we should be spreading the message about buying locally with our discretionary spend and where we can to even make those eight pizza-purchasing decisions. For people who have no idea what I mean about that you can read back.

I want to give a quick shout out because the time is short for me, but it is unfair to single one out, but one business in my electorate, Wiseguise, who sell pizzas, have said that they are absolutely breaking their hearts, 'watching my peers being forced to close their doors amid the COVID-19 virus'. I imagine that this pizza shop is still continuing because people are buying takeaway food. He said:

The Prime Minister said yesterday we are a strong people. Together we will get through this. Together because that is the good old true blue Aussie spirit. Lend a hand to your mates when they need you. Our community needs us. We are introducing a buddy system. We would love you 'guise' -

a play on his business name -

to nominate a restaurant that has been forced to close during this time. Even though they have shut the doors the bills do not stop. We will buddy up with them and help put in for their rent and bills up to \$500 per week for the next two months.

That is what one business can do. A bit of local impact. I am certainly not preaching that others should do it. But we would love it if they would consider doing something that they are able to do to support someone else who is not able to help themselves in a stronger way.

It is a bit unfair to single one out because this is going to be happening. As we are here and as we are speaking, this will be happening right across the Tasmanian community. Let us applaud that, support it and not just make enough of the virtue of one case. Let us try to see it replicated and provide the inspiration for more to do likewise. It is that kind of attitude that will help our state to rise back out of this emergency and bounce back more quickly.

I accept and agree with the point made about the importance of time frames, particularly around federal initiatives; the government assistance for people who need it most. I am only repeating what others have said but let us leave the Centrelink office alone unless you do need the immediate support. That is our way. If you need the emergency support, be in the line of course, but if you could hang back for a few days because you have got some annual leave or you have got some long service leave, maybe just leave it for a few days while the more immediate needs of those people are being met.

The technology and the notion that Ms Ogilvie made about making sure that we can continue our important representative democracy, we all support that and technology is part of that.

Madam Speaker, I have to compliment you and our Clerk for making sure that the new teleconference services are provided for members of the parliament. It is terrific. There should be more of it and I agree that the disruption that is occurring in our community and which is affecting our economy, for a nimble state like ours, it can be an opportunity for improved ways of doing business after the emergency.

The Premier has written to local government, all the councils, urging them to do what they can. The federal government is acting; the state government is acting. We want local government also to act. Some councils are sending out fees and rates notices right now. It could not be worse timing. I can think of at least one major council that has made a specific decision regarding fee and charge relief, so the Premier and the local government minister are continuing to drive that message home.

Ms Ogilvie, I am happy to take on board your comments around the role potentially of utilities to provide some relief to our business community and people doing it tough. The Government is considering that comment.

Work is well underway on a second package as we endeavour to respond to a challenging, rapidly changing environment. We hope to be in a position to announce the next package within days. It is too early and I am not in a position to announce the contents of the next package. That is the role for the Premier but we are looking at everything that can be done to cushion the impact on Tasmanians, our businesses and the economy.

I believe the final set of comments that I will address are around the representational democracy that both Ms Ogilvie and Ms O'Connor have specifically raised, as well as at the briefings. The Government continues to listen to everyone, including members of parliament, business and the broader community. That is important to us and if we have not been doing that then our policies are virtue signalling and not actually doing good. We want to do good. We are listening intently. We are taking advice from people, including their unsolicited contact and good ideas. We are responding wherever we can to address the issues as we see them and to implement stimulus and other measures to cushion the impact of COVID-19 on our people and on our economy.

All new stimulus measures will be publicly announced. This parliament is giving permission to the Government to get on and do more, as required, in the time that those opportunities present.

We cannot predict all of those but we are happy to make a commitment - and I am deliberately making it now so that it is on the record - that all new stimulus measures will be publicly announced.

**Ms O'Connor** - With respect, that is actually no great announcement. Of course you will be publicly announcing stimulus packages. The question was more about the level of engagement with your political colleagues and parties, wasn't it?

**Mr FERGUSON** - The point I am making is that we are taking on trust the opportunity for the extra appropriations. We intend to honour that trust with being public about how we are going to use it.

Regarding engaging with members of parliament, we will continue to consult stakeholders, where appropriate and possible, and that will include members of parliament. If you have a good idea and you would like it to be considered, we invite it. We invite you to contact us. We will not be able to do everything, we know that, but we would be always open to your suggestions.

These are unprecedented times. We do not know the frequency or duration of future sittings of this House. We hope that it will be business as usual. We suspect it might not be so we do need to be able to respond swiftly with stimulus and support measures in a timely way. I am very grateful, and I say this on behalf of the Premier and Treasurer as well, we are very grateful that we have been able to conduct ourselves in this way to allow us the ability to move in ways that support business and support Tasmanians.

There is a range of reporting measures. They include quarterly reports, annual reports and Revised Estimates reports. The next set of official budget papers will update all of the foregoing. They will all provide mechanisms to bring government accountability and scrutiny.

We do not know what lies ahead. If you are being very precautionary you will accept that even the Treasury workforce could be compromised in some ways. We will use best endeavours to ensure that all of these important elements of our system of accountability are prepared and presented on a timely basis. We accept up front, that if that were ever to be compromised we have to explain it and we will do so in the appropriate way with members of the opposition and the crossbench.

I am scanning my notes. I feel I have covered the questions and I would like to conclude with a more hopeful tone, which is picking up everybody's threads.

It is vitally important that we do what we can to maintain a confidence. Yes, consumer and community confidence right now has taken a big hit. It is true but it is our choice about whether we let that hit in confidence persist when we think about our future. If people believe that they have no future, confidence will take an even bigger hit and it will become self-fulfilling. There is a duty on government and on opposition and across the Greens and the crossbenches. It is vital that we do provide what is required of us and that is our fair share of carrying the duty of office and the duty of making decisions and policy decisions and funding decisions.

People also are looking to us, not just the Government, people are looking to this House, people of our community are wondering what our future looks like. If we paint a realistic but positive picture of what our future looks like, their eyes will lift. They will see over the horizon that things will get better. We will get through this. If people do not believe that they will make even more

conservative personal financial decisions. They will be even more restrictive about supporting those local shops and hunting bargains online.

**Ms O'Connor** - And they will despair which is the last thing.

**Mr FERGUSON** - And they will despair, Ms O'Connor. I could not have said it better. The enemy of despair is hope and that is an inspirational message. It is not waffle. It is not even euphemistic. It has to be a reality because confidence, while it is an intangible, is very real. You can feel it the community when things are going well and have been going so well. You can feel it.

Confidence leads people to make more proactive decisions, to sign that lease, to take that loan, to take on that extra employee. Our message on behalf of this Government, and I hope to speak on behalf of others, is that we will get through this. The germ will pass in time. We do not know how long, but when it does our state is better prepared than any other to rise back up, to resume our previous strong position as a growing economy and for people to again start to sign those leases, take back on those employees who might have been stood down and get on with a positive future for our state. Thank you for your support for this legislation.

**Bill read the second time.**

**Bill read the third time.**

## **SUPPLY BILL (No. 1) 2020 (No. 11)**

### **Second Reading**

[3.35 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I move

-

That the bill be now read the second time.

I believe all members of this House have a good understanding of the challenges we are currently facing as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the health impacts, this pandemic will clearly have very real and significant economic and social consequences, many of which are just beginning to emerge. The Premier has previously noted that we expect to see increasing economic impacts on a wide range of Tasmanian industry sectors, from tourism and hospitality businesses, seafood exporters and wild fisheries, through to retailers and manufacturers reliant on international supply chains.

The Premier and Treasurer has made it very clear that this Government will do everything it can to manage and mitigate the economic and social impacts and we will work to ensure that our businesses, our workforce and our communities are well positioned for a successful recovery. The Government will make available whatever resources are required to combat this virus, to keep people safe and to support our economy and Tasmanian jobs.



Given these difficult circumstances, we have closely considered the most appropriate approach to the development of the 2020-21 State Budget which was previously scheduled to be delivered on 4 June this year. In particular, I note issues such as:

- the current high level of uncertainty in relation to the cost of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the nature of the expenditure that will need to be incurred and the timing of that expenditure;
- the current high level of uncertainty in relation to the impact on the Government's revenue including GST receipts, state taxation receipts and returns from government businesses;
- the importance of the prioritisation of expenditure toward supporting the Tasmanian community in addressing the impact of the coronavirus;
- the potential impact the coronavirus could have on the budget process, including the preparation of the extensive budget documentation and the consideration of the budget papers by parliament; and
- the importance of having a timely and tailored budget response that is able to support and drive the recovery of the state once the worst of the impacts have passed.

With these and other issues in mind, we have made the decision to delay the development and tabling of the 2020-21 Budget until later this calendar year. We consider that this approach is both necessary and responsible in the current environment.

As is standard practice when the Budget has not been passed by the commencement of the budget year, a supply bill has been prepared to ensure that government services can continue to be provided until the Budget has been passed by parliament. This supply bill has been drafted on the basis of the provision of six months of funding and appropriates \$3.02 billion. This amount has been based on the 2019-20 budget estimate for 2020-21 adjusted to reflect initiatives funded in the supplementary appropriation bill, including those detailed in the 2019-20 Revised Estimates Report, the Premier's Address and the economic stimulus package. It also takes into account the timing of expenditure during the year by agencies.

Consistent with the approach adopted in the supplementary appropriation bill, an additional appropriation amount for Finance-General of \$180 million has also been provided to facilitate the funding of currently unknown costs in relation to addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This provision is in addition to an allocation of \$70 million to the Treasurer's Reserve. In providing a briefing on the supplementary appropriation bill and this bill, the secretary of Treasury has provided a commitment in relation to the provision of information in relation to expenditure incurred from these provisions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, while we are living in challenging times, the use of supply bills is in itself not unusual. Supply bills have most recently been tabled and passed by parliament following state elections in 2006, 2014 and 2018.

The Government's aim is to recognise the challenges that we face, protect the Tasmanian community, respond quickly and effectively, support Tasmanian people, businesses and industries and ensure that Tasmania comes out of this event strong, healthy and returns to being the economic

powerhouse of the nation. The delay of the 2020-21 Budget and the passage of this supply bill are important elements of the Government's considered response to the environment that we currently face. I thank members for their support of this bill and commend it to the House.

**Bill read the second time.**

**Bill read the third time.**

## **SUPPLY BILL (No. 2) 2020 (No. 12)**

### **Second Reading**

[3.40 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

In accordance with current appropriation convention, two supply bills have been prepared, one to provide funding for the services of the Government and the other to provide funding for the services of parliament and statutory offices.

I have recently provided a detailed outline of the reasons for the supply bills to be prepared for the 2020-21 budget year in the second reading speech relating to Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020. The information provided in that speech applies equally to this bill.

Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020 seeks parliament's approval for an amount of \$17.8 million for expenditure on operating services. I thank members for their support and commend the bill to the House.

**Bill read the second time.**

**Bill read the third time.**

## **TAXATION AND RELATED LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL 2020 (No. 13)**

### **Second Reading**

[3.40 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

On 17 March 2020, the Government announced a number of measures to mitigate the economic risk of the COVID-19 outbreak in Tasmania. The Government is committed to managing and mitigating the very real and significant economic impact of the virus on businesses, jobs, families and the Tasmanian community.

Among those measures, the Government announced three important payroll tax relief initiatives which will provide tangible support to affected businesses and employers in Tasmania, including businesses with youth employees, businesses in the hospitality, tourism and seafood industries and small to medium-sized businesses impacted by the virus.

This bill amends the Payroll Tax Rebate (Apprentices, Trainees and Youth Employees) Act 2017 to provide for the first of those initiatives. The amendment provides that businesses that newly employed persons aged 24 years and under between 1 April 2020 and 31 December 2020 will be eligible for a one-year rebate of payroll tax paid for those eligible employees. This initiative will encourage businesses to employ young people in Tasmania and is expected to cost around \$280 000.

This bill also amends the Payroll Tax Act 2008 to provide two other important payroll tax relief measures that will support Tasmanian jobs. The first of these two measures is a waiver from payroll tax for hospitality, tourism and seafood industry businesses in Tasmania for the final four months of the 2019-20 financial year. It is expected that this will save businesses around \$7 million over that period, enabling them to keep more Tasmanians employed.

The second measure will provide a waiver from payroll tax for small to medium businesses with an annual payroll of up to \$5 million in Australian wages whose operations have been impacted by the virus. This waiver will be for the three months to June 2020 and is expected to cost up to \$9 million. Both of these measures will play an important role in mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses and the Tasmanian community.

To achieve this, the bill provides that the minister may make a ministerial order to waive the payment of payroll tax under the act for a specified period on the taxable wages paid to an employee or class of employees by an employer. The minister may also make an order to waive the requirement to lodge a specified document or return or other administrative processes required under the act. The amendment will provide the necessary flexibility to deliver payroll tax relief to additional industries or businesses or to extend the length of the payroll tax relief as required.

The power to make a ministerial order under these provisions will be limited by the period of the COVID-19 public health emergency. That means a ministerial order made under these provisions can only be made up until the first anniversary of the minister being notified by the Director of Public Health that there is no longer a public health emergency. Any order made during the public health emergency will also cease to have effect on that anniversary.

This bill has been drafted to provide flexibility in the operation of each of these three payroll tax relief measures. This is necessary to allow the Government to appropriately respond to changing circumstances during this period of uncertainty. These are unprecedented times and it is vital that this parliament does what it can to provide assistance to our businesses to keep Tasmanians in jobs.

This bill also amends the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to extend the \$20 000 First Home Owner Grant for newly constructed homes by two years from 1 July 2020. This extension was first announced in the Premier's Address on 3 March 2020.

We have taken the opportunity, while legislating these important payroll tax relief measures, to implement the extension of the grant well before it is due to revert to the base level of \$10 000 on 1 July 2020. This will provide certainty to both first home buyers and Tasmania's building and construction industry during these difficult times.

Extending the grant will provide important support to eligible first home owners and assist in ensuring that the housing market remains accessible to those buyers. The extension of the grant will also support activity in Tasmania's building and construction sector. This will not only increase the stock of housing in Tasmania but will also help in keeping skilled tradespeople employed in Tasmania, which is particularly important during these challenging economic times. I again thank members for their support for this legislation and commend this bill to the House.

**Bill read the second time.**

**Bill read the third time.**

### **SUSPENSION OF SITTING**

[3.50 p.m.]

**Mr FERGUSON** (Bass - Leader of Government Business) - Madam Deputy Speaker, I move -

That the House stand suspended until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

I thank everybody for their fantastic work and cooperation during the day. Advice will shortly be provided about bills for tomorrow.

**The House suspended at 3.50 p.m.**