



PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF DEBATES

Thursday 4 June 2020

REVISED EDITION

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

QUESTIONS

COVID-19 - Small Business Financial Hardship Grant Program

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.02 a.m.]

Yesterday, you feigned ignorance about problems with the small business hardship grants program despite being directly contacted by a number of affected businesses. You cannot ignore these problems any longer, and you undertook to follow up with the individual cases that we raised in question time yesterday. You also committed to taking advice from Treasury about the possibility of extending the program. There is urgency. Businesses are making decisions every day about whether they can continue to operate. What advice have you received and what action are you going to take to address the shambolic and unfair grants process that has caused unnecessary stress for small business?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I made it perfectly clear yesterday that I would take on board the matters that you raised and that I would seek advice. I spoke with the secretary of Treasury following question time yesterday and I spoke with the secretary of State Growth last night. I am expecting advice in coming days. I will consider that.

Regarding the businesses that you raised, without understanding their personal circumstances and how they were assessed and whether they met the guidelines, I was in no position to provide you with advice yesterday. I have taken those steps, as I said I would in this place, only 24 hours ago -

Ms White - When do you expect to be able to make a decision about that?

Mr GUTWEIN - Excuse me, do not badger me. I have said that I will receive advice in the coming days. That is my expectation and I am sure you heard that, so you were badgering. Let us be clear about that.

Ms White - I was querying a time frame on what you are actually going to do.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, please. A little respect on all sides.

Mr GUTWEIN - I made it perfectly clear that we would have a look at this and we will.

Social Housing Construction

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.04 a.m.]

We agree with the need to build more houses. Housing will play an important role in our social and economic recovery from coronavirus. We need a government capable of delivering more

houses to help more families into home ownership and to fix the crisis in housing affordability and availability. The last term of the Labor government saw the completion of 2217 new social and affordable homes in Tasmania.

Sadly, you are good at making record announcements but your record of delivery is woeful. In the past six years, your Liberal Government has built just 585 new social housing homes. The total social housing stock is actually less today than when you took office, a net decline of around 600 homes. Now you are claiming that you will build up to an additional 1000 social houses. Over what period will these be built and, given your track record, why should anybody believe that you could deliver?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thought that the Leader of the Opposition might have been happy with today's announcement. It surprises me that she is not.

Ms O'Connor - We are.

Mr GUTWEIN - Thank you. Yesterday, we had the very embarrassing moment in which the Leader of the Opposition and, I suspect, the shadow treasurer, had set up Dr Broad with a question regarding the Bridgewater bridge. As I pointed out yesterday, it was front and centre in his question and the Labor Party had the money for it 22 years ago. The most significant construction project that the Government has dealt with, the Royal Hobart Hospital rebuild, the Labor Party started the process 10 years ago and did not lay brick.

The funding that we have made available, which is record funding, will underpin 1000 social houses being built. That money will be available immediately. We will engage with community housing providers in terms of the partnerships we will work with, and we will get houses out of the ground.

In terms of housing affordability, I acknowledge the federal government's \$25 000 boost that they have provided today as well. That, with the state Government's \$20 000 first home building boost, which will be extended to owner-occupiers, will ensure that we get significant numbers of houses out of the ground, which will assist with housing affordability.

Ms WHITE - Madam Speaker, point of order on standing order 45, relevance. The question to the Premier was, how long will it take to build the 1000 social houses he has promised? I ask you to direct his attention to that.

Madam SPEAKER - I do not think that is a point of order, but if the Premier would like to give some sort of answer to that it would be good.

Mr GUTWEIN - Madam Speaker, I thought I had. The money is available now and we will begin working with community housing providers to get those houses out of the ground as quickly as we possibly can, creating jobs and underpinning our economy. That is something that I would have thought the Labor Party could have supported. It is obvious that they do not.

Logging of Threatened Species Habitat

Ms O'CONNOR question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.08 a.m.]

In a landmark decision last week, the Federal Court found VicForests, Victoria's forestry corporation, is not exempt from national environmental laws in its logging of threatened species habitat. Here, independent scientists have confirmed your Government's forestry business is clear felling and burning endangered swift parrot, masked owl and wedge-tailed eagle habitat. This is why your GBE has repeatedly failed to secure FSC certification: it is logging old forests that provide critical feeding and breeding habitat for species already pushed to the brink of extinction.

Has your Government sought advice on the implications of the Federal Court decision for Tasmania? In thinking about a truly sustainable future for this state, will you rediscover the old Peter Gutwein, who rightly and courageously called for an end to old growth logging in Tasmania?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens for that question, which I was certain she would get around to at some stage in terms of the decision in the Federal Court. We are aware of the Federal Court decision concerning VicForests and the Friends of Leadbeater's Possum. As most people would know, it is a complex case. The Federal Court ruling is specific to the Victorian situation which has a different set of circumstances to Tasmania. I have strong faith in our Regional Forestry Agreement and the work our industry does to protect our wildlife during their operations.

The Government recognises especially, our forestry industry is a corner stone of our Tasmanian economy. It employs thousands of people and injects more than \$1.2 billion into our economy whilst supporting regional communities and families. Our forest management systems and code are quite different from Victoria's and the processes by which threatened species are managed are also quite different.

The complex and detailed 430-page judgment is being reviewed at the moment. Regarding the Victorian decision we have a strong long-term Regional Forestry Agreement which provides certainty to a renewable sustainable forestry industry and a recognised world-class forest practices system administered by an independent Forest Practices Authority that delivers ecologically and environmentally sustainable forest management for the benefit of the state, the industry and, importantly, our community.

In answer to the question, yes, I am aware of it. We are taking advice on it.

COVID-19 - *Spirit Of Tasmania* - Subsidised Fares

Ms OGILVIE question to the PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.11 a.m.]

Tasmania's visitor economy sector has been smashed by the virus. There has been talk about providing free or subsidised fares on the *Spirit of Tasmania*. Will you act boldly to attract visitors back to Tasmania when you open our borders by also providing subsidised air travel?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Ms Ogilvie, the member for Clark, for that question and interest a very important matter for Tasmania. I have written recently to the federal government regarding the *Spirit* and supported the industry's position looking for support with passage on the *Spirit* when our borders open. For a range of reasons those passengers who would bring a campervan or caravan to Tasmania tend to stay longer and spend more, especially in our regional areas. As to the steps we will take as and when the borders open, obviously, we will ensure we will continue, and it is occurring now as I understand it on different platforms to remind people Tasmania has some of the most unique and beautiful and worthwhile places to visit in not just the country but the world. That process is ongoing.

When we get to a point when our borders can be opened, there will be strong demand for Tasmanian product. I have not considered subsidising air fares from the mainland and nobody has raised that matter with me. Demand for seats on planes will be determined by both the destination, but also the volume looking to travel as to how those seats are priced. My expectation at this stage is there will be strong demand for the Tasmanian product. I do not see a need for the Government to consider subsidising airline flights into Tasmania and hope when the borders do open we will see in large part the 85 per cent of people who used to travel to Tasmania from interstate as part of our overall tourism market, will come back and come back in spades.

I make the point that we will not release the controls on our borders until we are certain we can protect the health of Tasmanians. I have made it clear we will review that position in early July and will make an announcement then as to whether it will be sooner or later.

I hope as the rest of the country progresses through the pandemic they get to a place, especially Victoria and New South Wales, that we can have confidence we can open our border and allow people to travel once again to Tasmania, but I do not want to get in front of myself. We will review that in July based on public health advice and consider the situation then.

Rebuilding a Stronger Tasmania

Mrs PETRUSMA question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.15 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on our plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Mrs Petrusma, member for Franklin, for that question and interest in this matter, and also for the very good work she has been doing to support her constituents throughout this. She gave a fantastic contribution regarding John Beattie yesterday, acknowledged by the House.

The program I have outlined today for rebuilding Tasmania is a bold one but one we need. It will deliver around 15 000 new jobs, 2300 new homes for Tasmanians. Many of them are social, many affordable and importantly what it will do is bring demand forward at a time when we want to see that demand in our economy.

I want to say very clearly there has never been a better time to build a home in Tasmania and to employ Tasmanians whilst you are doing it: 2300 new homes, 15 000 new jobs across the package. Importantly, as I indicated a few weeks ago, the way we would underpin our economy moving forward would have Treasury look at those projects we had across our forward Estimates and current infrastructure spend, and bring forward those projects we could reasonably expect to be able to begin work on or bring work forward projects already underway and that is exactly what we have done.

Importantly, to rebuild Tasmania economically and socially one of the best things we can possibly do is to build more houses. To build more houses would assist our economy, create jobs and importantly provide a social dividend.

I was very surprised by Ms White's comment this morning. I thought she would have been very happy with the fact we have put in a significant and unprecedented investment into social housing. There will be \$100 million available to get on with the job of building houses and actually put roofs over people's heads, which is exactly what that side of the Chamber has been calling for.

Ms O'Connor - No, no. The Greens. Not that side.

Mr GUTWEIN - I note houses were part of the submission the Greens made to PESRAC and I wonder whether Labor is going to explain what they would do. Will they have the courage to put forward their plan for the rebuilding of Tasmania?

It will be interesting to see. They will not do an alternative budget but do they at least have an idea that they want to feed into PESRAC or do they want to continue to whinge and whine and carp?

I say get on board a \$1.3 billion boost to our economy. That is what we have announced this morning.

It will bring forward Government projects, it will build roads, it will bring forward schools. On the north-west coast it provides special attention as they went through the most difficult period. This will build confidence and importantly by focusing on construction we will have positive impact right through the supply chain. I have said on many occasions in this place the best way to grow aggregate demand is to build stuff, is to get stuff out of the ground, to employ Tasmanians. Aggregate demand will increase and people across a whole range of industries will benefit.

I did point out this morning -

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Order. I have been tolerant but this is really unruly, terrible conduct. There are a lot of people out there listening to this presentation and they would be very disappointed with the parliamentary behaviour. There are people out there who want to hear some good news, so please let the Premier continue in silence.

Mr GUTWEIN - Madam Speaker, thank you. It is good news. It is fantastic news for Tasmanians.

The last three months have been very difficult, but Tasmanians have put their shoulders to the wheel. They have limited their personal freedoms, and we have got on top of this virus. As I said this morning, I do expect that with testing to continue, at different times the virus will bubble up, but we are now in a position where we can respond and track and trace quickly. Our health system is well prepared to deal with it and, importantly, that provides the confidence to enable us to begin opening up our economy, albeit slowly.

What is important is that we provide the investment and the confidence that is necessary over the next couple of years to fill the gap. As I have said, \$1.3 billion of construction activity across the next two years will create about 15 000 new jobs and, importantly, it will deliver a social and economic dividend because it will assist in building about 2300 homes.

As I have said, there has never been a better time in Tasmania to build a new home. As an owner-occupier there has never been a better time. I encourage Tasmanians to get on board and support the programs because together we got on top of the virus. Together we will rebuild Tasmania.

COVID-19 - Support for Small Business Tenants

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.21 a.m.]

A pattern is emerging of you saying the right things, but failing to ensure that the actions match your rhetoric. Many small businesses have been forced to close as a result of coronavirus restrictions. In order to resume trading and employing people, commercial tenants need to have a building to come back to. Despite the introduction of a national code for SME commercial leasing principles agreed to by National Cabinet, and legislation passed by this parliament, multiple commercial tenants have contacted us reporting problems negotiating with their landlords.

One tenant who contacted the state government's coronavirus hotline was advised to enter mediation at their own expense. That is both an added cost and a disincentive for commercial tenants to seek resolution. In some cases, landlords are refusing to enter into negotiations. It has also been reported that while the cost of water, sewerage and electricity has been waived for landlords, in some cases those costs are still being passed on to tenants.

What are you going to do to ensure that small businesses do not go under, because the mechanisms you have set up to protect them are not working?

ANSWER

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

I want to point out that this House did legislate, and we have put in place the national code. The obligations are quite clear in terms of tenants and landlords, and mediation as well. The feedback that I have generally been receiving is that landlords, in the main, have been prepared to negotiate. If you have examples, rather than sitting on them and waiting to bring them into this place, I encourage you to bring them to our attention. Bring them to our attention and we will work on them. That is what I ask of the Leader of the Opposition.

In the main, the feedback I have received on this has been positive. In the main, landlords and tenants are able to work through and arrive at reasonable solutions. Mediation is allowed for under the legislation, and under that legislation I would expect that they would engage in that mediation.

If the Leader of the Opposition has a list of people who are having difficulty, I ask her to bring them to my attention or to the Attorney-General.

Swift Parrot - Preservation of Breeding Habitat

Dr WOODRUFF question to MINISTER for ENVIRONMENT and PARKS, Mr JAENSCH

[10.24 a.m.]

There are fewer than 1000 breeding pairs of the world's fastest parrot - the critically endangered swift parrot - left in the wild. It is essential we protect every nest hollow and flowering gum that they need to survive. Their biggest threat is habitat and food loss from illegal land clearing and native forest logging, as well as predation by the sugar glider.

The previous failed environment minister, Matthew Groom, refused to be an active state party member to the national swift parrot recovery plan and did not act to stop habitat destruction, or fund protection activities. Are we still even party to the swift parrot recovery plan? If we are, what is this year's resourcing towards it, and when will you announce a native forest logging ban for Bruny Island and the other southern and south-eastern forests that have to be protected to save that special parrot?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question about the swift parrot. The population size of the swift parrot is very difficult to assess. It is estimated, as I understand and am advised, to be about 2500, with perhaps only 1000 breeding pairs.

In response to the numerous threats faced by the species, the Tasmanian Government is implementing a whole-of-government approach to ensure that management of the swift parrot habitat in this state is consistent and effective. This will build on actions that we have undertaken previously to address threats to the swift parrot and its habitat. We have provided \$150 000 to trial methods of trapping sugar gliders, a major threat to the birds.

Dr Woodruff - That was in 2015. That was five years ago.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, please.

Mr JAENSCH - This project has been successfully completed. The findings have enabled NRM South to leverage \$700 000 of Australian Government funding for further swift parrot conservation work over the next three years.

In the past three years, staff of my department have worked with local governments, regional NRM organisations, Tasmania Police, Sustainable Timber Tasmania and other stakeholders to tackle the problem of illegal firewood harvesting, which has impacted several breeding sites. My department is cooperating with the forestry industry and regulators to apply the latest technology to

identify and manage those places critical to the swift parrot, and to put in place a formal agreement that supports this more sophisticated approach to habitat conservation.

My department has also undertaken programs to control invasive rainbow lorikeets, which compete with swift parrots for nest hollows -

Dr WOODRUFF - Madam Speaker, point of order. Relevance. This is a whole lot of material which is historical information. We asked a specific question about today. Are we party to the recovery plan, and is there funding towards protecting it now?

Madam SPEAKER - As you know, under the old rules, that is not a point of order, but under our cooperative approach, I urge the minister to be as relevant to the question as possible unless he wishes to advise the House later.

Mr JAENSCH - Thank you, Madam Speaker. Most recently, this has included assisting volunteers and landholders to manage the impacts of the birds, including by providing bird traps. My department also works closely with the Commonwealth to ensure that research findings provide practical conservation benefits for the swift parrot, and that conservation tools, such as the swift parrot recovery plan, are up to date. The plan is currently under review by the Australian Government.

Furthermore, my department's collaboration with other agencies and organisations helped to secure \$297 000 for researchers from the Australian National University to continue vital monitoring of swift parrot migration and breeding in Tasmania until 2021.

I have provided answers. There are questions regarding the status of the Australian Government's review of the swift parrot recovery plan, and I suggest the Greens direct their question there.

Housing - Rebuilding a Stronger Tasmania

Mr STREET question to MINISTER for HOUSING, Mr JAENSCH

[10.29 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on the Government's plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania in the area of housing?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr Street for his question, his interest and his support for this initiative. This is a great boost for our economy and for Tasmanians in need of housing. Tasmanians know that this Government has delivered for them over the last six years, and especially over these past few months. Tasmanian lives have been lost and together we have saved many as well.

While that work continues, we now need to turn our attention to the recovery of our economy, and reviving or replacing the jobs and businesses we have lost. Housing was a key priority for this Government before coronavirus hit and, as the Premier has said from day one, housing will also play a key role in our economic recovery.

The building and construction sector helped build the Tasmanian economy into one of the strongest in the nation before coronavirus but the clear message has been that its future is desperately uncertain beyond the next few months. These measures we have announced today will help to fill that void, for the building and construction sector itself and all the businesses and families that rely on the spend that flows through its supply chains, for building materials, tools, diesel fuel, pies, insurance and financial services, day care, school fees, clothing and groceries in every town in Tasmania.

Today's announcements are about backing our builders and supporting consumer confidence to build new homes in the private sector and for Tasmanians in need. The sweet win-win for Tasmania at this critical time is the opportunity to deliver the new housing we need at the time we most need the economic benefits of building it. We will broaden the eligibility for the existing \$20 000 First Home Owner Grant so that first home owners will continue to benefit and any qualifying owner-occupier who signs a building contract for the remainder of 2020 will be eligible for the grant as well. We will broaden eligibility for our home share mortgage equity program, raising income eligibility limits so more Tasmanian families on low incomes can take advantage of this opportunity to build or buy a home of their own.

The Government will build on its successful social housing building program, which delivered over 400 new social houses for Tasmanians in the 12 months to April and currently has around 250 under construction. In the past six months we have announced that \$34 million in savings from the Commonwealth Housing Debt Waiver Agreement will be used to deliver 300 new social housing dwellings over three years. Today's announcement will bring forward funding of \$14 million and provide new funding of \$10 million to ensure that all of these homes can be delivered by 2022, a year earlier than planned.

These measures will deliver support for the sector in the critical next six months, addressing the immediate market downturn but we need to provide confidence for the long term. That is why we are investing another \$100 million into new social housing builds over the next three years. These funds will deliver up to 1000 new social housing dwellings to be allocated to people who are priority applicants on the social housing register under new agreements being negotiated with our community housing providers, driving down our housing waiting list while providing longer-term, base load certainty for the building and construction sector.

This news is a game changer for the building industry's forecast concerns and I am proud to say it will deliver great outcomes for Tasmanians in need as well. This is not a sugar hit for the building sector, not only a fixed-term reprieve for those waiting for housing, not only social housing or economic stimulus. This unprecedented investment will mean more Tasmanians are put into homes and there will be more jobs for builders. It builds on the work already being done under our \$200 million Affordable Housing Strategy. The program and works are being delivered because of our debt waiver, a \$4.3 million investment in emergency homeless accommodation and services and our \$5 million investment in expansion of our shelters and supported accommodation.

These measures further complement actions that have already been taken in response to coronavirus, such as capping increases to rents in social housing and the private rental market, restricting evictions across the state and funding almost 100 new places in our private rental incentive and rapid rehousing programs. This is our track record of delivering and investing into housing, the industry and for those Tasmanians who need us now more than ever, those who need housing and those who can build it. I thank the House for this opportunity to update you on this important matter.

COVID-19 - Residential Tenancy Rent Relief

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for BUILDING and CONSTRUCTION, Ms ARCHER

[10.35 a.m.]

The support system you set up to provide rent relief to struggling Tasmanians is not working. Last week I met Caitlyn, a casual worker who lost hours as a result of coronavirus and did not qualify for JobKeeper. She has been unsuccessfully trying to contact her landlord to reach an agreement about a rent reduction, which is a mandatory requirement your Government has put in place before she can apply for assistance. Every day that people like Caitlyn cannot access support creates additional financial hardship and stress. Her landlord continues to refuse to agree to a rent reduction, which means that she cannot access any help. Rather than making tenants jump through hoops, will you immediately commit to changing the application process so people like Caitlyn can get the support they so desperately need?

Ms O'Connor - I hope you referred Caitlyn to the Residential Tenancy Commissioner.

Ms Haddad - Absolutely, she has. He told her to go away.

ANSWER

Thank you, Ms O'Connor, that is exactly what the Labor Opposition should do. CBOS is there to help tenants and landlords through this process.

Madam Speaker, I have been very clear: it is not a requirement to make tenants or landlords jump through hoops. I hope that members have had an opportunity to also discuss this with the Tenants' Union because they are fully supportive of the rent relief fund that has been established by the Government. The Premier and I met with the Tenants' Union in person, along with the Residential Tenancy Commissioner, both sides of the equation, if you like, so that we could come up with a rent relief fund that was designed to assist tenants. It is also to assist landlords because we know that landlords are hurting through this process, particularly landlords who rely solely on income from their tenanted properties as their only form of income in some cases, or at least a large portion.

This rent relief fund was designed specifically to ensure that those who fell through the cracks of the significant measures that we had already put in place would be captured, and that included migrants and temporary visa holders as well. It does not exclude people who are receiving JobKeeper or Jobseeker payments.

In relation to the specific example you have provided, I encourage any tenant or landlord, for that matter, having difficulty reaching an agreement to contact the Residential Tenancy Commissioner. He has been very clear that the rent reduction is there for a reason. It is to provide an incentive. This is a really important feature, and the Tenants' Union fully embraced that it needed to occur so that there was incentive, particularly for landlords, to reach a negotiation. Up to \$2000, or four weeks' rent, that the Government is willing to contribute to this stretches a lot further in that instance. It always has to be that negotiated outcome and the parties are encouraged to utilise the Residential Tenancy Commissioner, who will work through that process with them.

Ms White - And what do they do?

Ms ARCHER - Ms White, if you have a concerned constituent, please contact me, like many other members of the House are doing, or refer them direct to the Residential Tenancy Commissioner. He is a very reasonable bloke and is doing a great job in these matters. All members, I am sure, have come into contact with him recently in briefings for our bills.

We want to have a negotiated outcome. It is not requiring landlords and tenants to jump through hoops. I draw the House's attention to the article I referred to in which the Tenant's Union, specifically Ben Bartl, the senior principal solicitor, fully embraced the policy and said that what the fund is doing is saying that we do not want nasty landlords because all that does is prolong the agony for the tenant. From the Tenants' Union's perspective, it is a good policy because it provides an incentive for landlords to enter into rent reduction negotiations. If they knew they were going to get the money straight away anyway, why would they reduce the rent?

He goes on to say a lot of good things in that article. It just goes to show that when the Government works with the Tenants' Union, with the Residential Tenancy Commissioner, with all the parties, and is willing to assist through this process, then we should have a good negotiated outcome.

I will repeat myself: I encourage the Leader of the Opposition, rather than thinking that you can have a gotcha moment or have a political pot-shot in this place - it seems that the goodwill has gone in that regard - in these very challenging times and indeed for landlords as well as tenants, we encourage the parties to sit down and negotiate together. If they are unable to do that, to seek assistance from the Residential Tenancy Commissioner.

COVID-19 - Residential Tenancy Rent Relief

Ms WHITE question to MINISTER for BUILDING and CONSTRUCTION, Ms ARCHER

[10.40 a.m.]

Caitlin followed the advice in your media release, which you just repeated in your last answer, and she did contact the Residential Tenancy Commissioner.

On her first attempt she was told that she was ineligible because she did not have the consent of her landlord. She was first directed to Anglicare and then redirected to Colony 47. I instructed her that she should try again. On her second attempt after speaking to multiple people at the Residential Tenancy office, and quoting the media release that you have again referenced, she was told to put her inquiry in writing.

Yesterday, the Residential Tenancy officer responded with the following -

Unfortunately, an agreement from the owner to reduce rent is a requirement to access the rent relief scheme. Our office cannot require that they agree to the reduction nor attempt to negotiate that on your behalf.

I can only suggest that your real estate agent keep trying to contact the client to discuss an outcome for you.

I am sorry, I cannot provide any further assistance.

Have you willingly misled parliament, or do you simply not understand your portfolio and the process that you have established, which is making it impossible for some tenants in genuine need to access the help that they need?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, in that case, I urge Ms White to write to me with -

Ms White - How many times does she need to try to get help?

Ms ARCHER - No, no, with the constituent's details and I will get onto that personally. It is certainly not my intention or my instruction that that type of response be provided. I am sure the Residential Tenancy Commissioner himself will want to take that matter over. Indeed, I will make sure that your constituent receives contact direct from the Residential Tenancy Commissioner in relation to that response.

Ms White - She has been in touch multiple times.

Ms ARCHER - Not to the office. Please provide me with her details, with her consent.

Ms White interjecting.

Ms ARCHER - Please listen to what I am saying. I am getting you one on one time for your constituent with the Residential Tenancy Commissioner because that is what should happen.

Roads Infrastructure - Rebuilding a Stronger Tasmania

Mrs PETRUSMA question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr FERGUSON

[10.42 a.m.]

We know that we need to build our way to recovery. Can you please outline to the House how the Government's plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania is investing in roads and bridge upgrades?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Mrs Petrusma, the member for Franklin, for the question. The Tasmanian majority Liberal Government is delivering job creating infrastructure with a record \$3.7 billion investment program across the state. It is keeping our departments very busy, it is keeping industry very busy, and we are about to make them even busier.

We are investing \$1.7 billion over four years specifically in roads and bridges to ensure safe and efficient travel for freight tourists and other road users. This includes the Launceston and Tamar Valley traffic vision, the upgrade of the Hobart Airport interchange on the Tasman Highway, and we are delivering the \$92 million Perth links road upgrade to the Midland Highway well ahead of schedule and it is nearly finished.

We are also progressing Hobart City Deal projects with our partners. This includes the Southern Outlet transit lane plus priority measures on Macquarie and Davey Streets, and Ms Archer and Ms Ogilvie, we are also fixing Davey Street.

The work is underway on the \$576 million Bridgewater bridge with geotechnical specialists on site earlier this year to help inform the final design - groans from the other side who, of course, did not do that; groaning will not lay a brick - and also an ECI engagement that is just about to kick off.

We are also investing \$100 million for upgrades to the Bass Highway, Wynyard to Marrawah corridor, a vital freight and tourist corridor. Mr Jaensch, indeed, I agree with you.

For the next financial year our roads and bridges budget already stands at a record \$378.5 million and continues at that level into the 2021-22 financial year.

The Premier has added to our program this morning. The Government has announced our multi-billion-dollar infrastructure blitz for the next two years in our plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania as we build our way out of coronavirus. We are investing now an additional \$40 million over the next two years. That brings our total two-year spend on roads and bridges to a staggering \$793 million. Members will be keen to know how that will be allocated.

The new funding will be invested right around the state into identified needed road and bridge upgrades: a new overpass and slip lane at the Leith Road intersection on the Bass Highway; upgrading the Apsley River bridge on the iconic Great Eastern Drive; improving Bridport Road west of Dalrymple Road, one of your favourites, Premier; and upgrading the local road connections to the imminent duplication of the East Derwent Highway at Geilston Bay, Mrs Petrusma and Mr Street. I know they are of great interest to you and thank you for your contributions.

We are also accelerating delivery of our existing and massive infrastructure program to get these projects under way. We are using new methods of getting projects to market with a focus on design and construct contracts: early contactor involvement, a closer partnership with industry, closer than has ever been the case before, and program delivery rather than traditional construct only contracts.

We have a significant pipeline of projects planned to be tendered in the coming months: the Bass Highway, Cooe/Wynyard road realignment; stage 1 of Wynyard to Marrawah; further investment on the Great Eastern Drive at St Helens; the duplication of the East Derwent Highway; upgrades of the Batman Highway; the duplication of the Tasman Highway at Midway Point as part of the south east traffic solution; and in the installation of intelligent traffic systems on the Tasman Highway to help our traffic move better.

On top of all of that we are also using accelerated procurement process on these \$40 million projects. Most importantly, we have heard the concerns of our colleagues in the civil construction sector about the pipeline of private work in the next 12 and 18 months, in working with the Minister for Building and Construction specifically with those organisations. By getting these projects awarded sooner, getting contracts into the hands of civil contractors, we will provide the local construction industry with certainty of work and, more importantly, certainty of employment in the coming months and into the next construction season particularly as we are approaching summer.

The first tranche of projects under this package are now out to market: the safety upgrades on the Highland Lakes Road, at the Pub with no Beer corner, a particular one of interest to Mr Barnett and the mayor, Lou Triffitt; improved turning facilities on the Bass Highway at Boat Harbour which marks the start of our work on the \$100 million upgrades of the Bass Highway and that was advertised only last Saturday; and road widening and improved turning facilities on the Arthur Highway at Eaglehawk Neck. A further nine projects will be put to market under this process as well including bridge strengthening works, the upgrade of Binnalong Bay Road, the Bruny Island land side infrastructure, and road widening works on the Midland Highway between Powranna and Tunbridge.

Our record \$378 million roads budget next financial year already includes other significant projects: the new Hobart Airport interchange, which is now with Hazell Brothers, a great local Tasmanian business; park and ride facilities at Kingborough; the West Tamar Highway upgrades; and the start of the Bass Highway upgrades, as I have mentioned.

They are all on track to start later this year for our construction season. As I conclude, the facts are very clear. This Government, the Tasmanian majority Liberal Government, is continuing our strong investment focus in our state. We have accelerated it because we are pro-jobs, we are pro-business and we want to help Tasmania build its way out of what has been a very challenging time due to coronavirus.

Westbury Prison - Objection to Site

Ms BUTLER question to MINISTER for CORRECTIONS, Ms ARCHER

[10.49 a.m.]

Opposition to building a maximum security prison at Westbury has been steadily growing. It is now obvious to everyone but the Government that Westbury is the wrong place for the prison and that you should find a different site. The head of the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Michael Bailey, is the latest to voice his opposition to the Westbury site. In an article in an excellent local newspaper, *Meander Valley Gazette*, Mr Bailey said,

If I were the government I'd press "reset". I'd focus on moving it to a viable location and get on with it. I think the prison has been an absolute failure as far as communication goes. I can understand the Westbury community being really worried about it. The government needs to change tact and do it quickly.

Mr Bailey's comments come as you sit on the results of the Social and Economic Impact Study into that project. Will you finally release the report and follow Michael Bailey's advice to find another site for the northern prison?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question because it gives me an opportunity to say and confirm, as I have in media comments, that the Government received the report late on Friday. We need time to thoroughly consider that. I ask members of the community, and Ms Butler and her colleagues, to be patient.

We have only announced a preferred site. We have not made a final decision. That will be announced very soon. I do not agree with the commentary that nine months of consultation is a complete and utter waste of time. We came out with a preferred site because it was a site that ticked all the boxes in terms of the site criteria. We have consulted thoroughly with the community. The mail out survey and the phone survey came out of my one-on-one consultations with the community. They were valuable. The public meeting that I held was valuable. We have taken all of that feedback on board. Had I not done any of that consultation I would have been criticised for that as well.

It does not appear that Government can keep this Opposition happy. There has been a delay recently and it is called COVID-19 pandemic. That did delay the delivery of the survey but 8500 households received that mailout.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Order.

Ms ARCHER - We did, at the request of the community -

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Excuse me, does anyone realise that the Speaker is here?

Ms ARCHER - We did, at the request of the community, extend time for that mailout survey. People wanted time to consider that. They wanted time also because they had their time during COVID-19 to complete that mailout survey. The consultants received 120 requests for additional surveys.

I would like to clarify why each and every member on the electoral roll could not receive that. That is because we did not have the authority from the Electoral Commissioner to utilise those details. That is something that has been completely taken out of context and being used as a conspiracy theory.

Ms Butler - Does that explain why the mayor did not get a survey?

Ms ARCHER - I have written to the mayor about the fact that he did not receive it but the list that we used was provided by his council. So I am surprised that the mayor did not receive a copy and I am surprised that the mayor was not aware that he could receive an additional survey because it was widely advertised.

Ms Butler - He was scathing too, wasn't he? Everything you have done with this has been a real problem.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, Ms Butler, please.

Ms ARCHER - Because we wanted to capture everybody who wanted to complete a survey, we said we would supply a survey to them. We went to significant lengths to ensure that people had access to that survey. Instead of using this as an opportunity as the Lyons platform, because I know there is competition between you and your Leader -

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, please.

Ms ARCHER - In any event, the Government, as I said, will thoroughly consider the report. We will make a fully informed decision and at that time, the Social and Economic Impact Report, in its entirety, the full report, will be released. That announcement will be soon.

COVID-19 - School Bus Runs

Dr BROAD question to **PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN**

[10.55 a.m.]

You have stressed on multiple occasions the need for Tasmanians to continue to be vigilant in exercising social distancing. That means keeping at least one and a half metres away from other people and avoiding confined spaces. That advice does not appear to extend to school buses, which have already begun filling up as kids return to school. Parents in the north-west have expressed concern about the large number of kids who are being forced to stand on buses. Not only is it impossible for them to practice social distancing, it is also dangerous with buses travelling long distances on the highway at the speed of 110 kph, in particular bus routes from Turners Beach in Ulverstone through to Burnie.

The response to these concerns from your Government has been to tell parents that licensing requirements are being met and if they do not like it, parents should find another way to get their kids to school. Clearly, this is unacceptable.

Will you commit to putting more school buses on runs like this one to reduce overcrowding and improve safety?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Dr Broad for his question and his interest in this important matter. I will start by saying that the AHPPC advice is that travel on school buses is safe, and travel on buses is safe. We have taken steps with operators to ensure that school buses are now cleaned more regularly. Importantly, guidelines have been provided to provide direction to bus operators regarding the safe operation of those buses in the COVID-19 environment.

The matter you raise, and by interjection the minister for Infrastructure made a salient point, and that is that we have provided additional buses on routes to ensure that we can get our children to school safely.

I make this point regarding what appears to be the intent of the questioning that is coming from the other side in respect of raising constituent issues during question time -

Ms White - How dare we do that through parliamentary process.

Mr GUTWEIN - If you are seriously interested in resolution of some of the matters that you have raised today, as the Attorney-General made the point very clearly to you, Ms White, bring those to the Government's attention and we will work through them.

Ms White - We have.

Dr BROAD - Madam Speaker, point of order. This is complete rubbish. We do write to you and we do not get responses. The parents are very upset about this. They have written to the state department and the state department has said, 'Get your kids to school another way'. There is overcrowding on these buses. They are travelling at 110 kph and parents are concerned. What are you going to do about it?

Madam SPEAKER - That is not a point of order, but I am sure the Premier will be happy to address it.

Mr GUTWEIN - Madam Speaker, the point I was making is that if the Labor Party is interested in getting some of these matters resolved, then rather than looking for gotcha moments in question time, I encourage them to bring those matters forward and we will look at them, to do what we can to assist those constituents.

That has been the way we have approached this from day one, through this process, and with goodwill towards other members in this place, with the very clear aim of ensuring that we work closely with Tasmanians and assist them through what is a very difficult period.

As I said yesterday morning, I hoped that the goodwill could have continued, but it is obvious that you want to return to gotcha moments and politics in this place. I say to constituents, very clearly -

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Order.

Mr GUTWEIN - and to members of this House, if you want to see matters progressed, rather than sitting on them and using gotcha moments in this place, bring them forward and we will do our very best and we will maintain the goodwill that we have seen exist. We will work with you to try to get some outcomes. It is quite obvious that you have decided to leave that at the door and are looking for gotcha moments.

Regarding the advice that I have just provided you, Dr Broad, as I have said, the advice is that it is safe to travel on school buses, as school buses have been provided with direction in terms of additional cleaning requirements, and we have placed additional buses on routes. If there are issues, and if Dr Broad is concerned about a particular matter, rather than raise it here and look for a gotcha moment, we are more than happy to work through these matters and see if we can find resolution.

COVID-19 - Sports Support Grants

Mr STREET question to MINISTER for SPORT and RECREATION, Ms HOWLETT

[11.02 a.m.]

Can you update the House on the Government's plan to rebuild a stronger Tasmania by assisting grassroots sporting clubs? And, can the minister also update the House on progress with the previously announced COVID-19 sports support grants which were designed to maintain employment across sporting codes?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Franklin for his question. Sporting clubs and organisations play an enormous role within our state. In many areas they are the good that brings communities together. We acknowledge the difficulties being faced by sporting clubs and participants across Tasmania as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a broad range of competition, rosters, and events being interrupted in accordance with public health advice.

Our Government was the first in Australia to announce grants to maintain employment in sporting organisations following the collapse in revenues such as registration fees, gate fees, bar and canteen takings. While maintaining employment is a key priority, we also want to ensure that interruptions to sporting competitions do not lead to long-term decline in participation.

I am pleased to advise that 29 applications were received for the first tranche of the funding, with 25 applications approved. Importantly, this has ensured 187 Tasmanians will remain in their jobs throughout this crisis, ensuring continuity for the community sports that help to keep Tasmanians fit, healthy and connected. It is envisaged that tranche two of the grants program, which I hope to announce shortly, will further assist grassroots sporting clubs with direct financial assistance on their return to play.

Sporting clubs were also delighted to hear the Premier announce this morning a \$10 million fund to encourage participation in community sports by improving the amenity of facilities for participants, officials and spectators. This grants program, improving the playing field, will also provide a major stimulus to the construction industry across urban and regional Tasmania. Improving the playing fields grants of between \$25 000 and \$250 000 will be made available for capital works such as change rooms, toilets, shower facilities, accessibility, lighting, security, fencing, scoreboards, drainage and other civil construction works.

Applications will be considered from clubs, peak bodies and councils or other organisations responsible for sporting facilities and the fund will be open for applications in coming weeks.

Improving the playing field will support all participants - women and men of all ages, girls and boys - and I look forward to the release of further details in due course.

In closing, I sincerely thank all Tasmanian sport organisations including players, coaches, officials, supporters and our very important volunteers for their understanding and their resilience during this very difficult period.

ANSWER TO QUESTION

COVID-19 - Residential Tenancy Rental Relief

[11.06 a.m.]

Ms ARCHER (Clark - Minister for Building and Construction) - Madam Speaker, on indulgence, I wanted to add to a question that was asked of me by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the rental relief fund. I have advice from the Residential Tenancy Commissioner that in that particular instance there was a new person working on that. He apologies for that error. He will and has looked at that one and will be looking at that one personally.

I advise that where parties are unable to reach agreement with their landlord that there is a discretion to pay tenants directly. That has always been the case. He will contact the tenant today to explain the error and offer her assistance.

Time expired.

PETITION

Anti-Protest Laws

Ms O'Connor presented an e-petition signed by approximately 764 petitioners requesting that the House vote against the Workplaces (Protection from Protesters) Amendment Bill 2019. The petition conforms with the relevant Standing Orders and Rules of the House.

Petition received.

TABLED PAPER

Subordinate Legislation Committee - Scrutiny of Notices Issued under the COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020

Mr TUCKER (Lyons)(by leave) - Madam Speaker, I have the honour to bring up the following report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation -

Scrutiny and Notices Issued under the COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 – Report No. 4.

Report received.

MESSAGE FROM LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Joint Select Committee on Tasmania's COVID-19 Response and Recovery

[11.12 a.m.]

The following Message was received from the Legislative Council -

Madam Speaker,

The Legislative Council having this day agreed to the following Resolution, now transmits the same to the House of Assembly, and to request its concurrence therein -

Resolved, that noting the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of Tasmanians and given the emergency response by the Tasmanian Government including Coronavirus related expenditure, legislative and public policy developments, that a Joint Select Committee be appointed with power to send for persons and papers, with leave to sit during any adjournment of either

House, with leave to adjourn from place to place and with leave to report from time to time to inquire into and report upon -

- (1)(a) the State's immediate and ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery measures;
 - (b) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health, economic and social lives of Tasmanians; and
 - (c) any other matter incidental thereto; and
- (2) that the number of Members to serve on the said Committee on the part of the Legislative Council be four.

C. M. Farrell
President
Legislative Council
3 June 2020

MOTION

Joint Select Committee on Tasmania's COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Mr GUTWEIN (Bass - Premier) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the message be taken into consideration forthwith.

Motion agreed.

Mr GUTWEIN (Bass - Premier) - Madam Speaker, I move -

That the Resolution of the Legislative Council be disagreed to.

Madam Speaker, when we suspended parliament some months ago there was a call by the member, who moved that motion and spoke to it in the upper House yesterday, for a committee to be established and calls by others for committees to be established on the basis that the parliament was not sitting, and that the scrutiny of parliament would not be available in terms of the COVID-19 response.

I heard those concerns. I took action and brought the parliament back. In fact, whilst the parliament has had a slightly thinner weekly sitting schedule, the parliament has met in every week that it was due to meet therefore providing a level of scrutiny that was called for at that particular time.

The other point I will make is that, in terms of the scrutiny that is available into the Government's response, we already have two standing committees that are inquiring into the Government's response - the Subordinate Legislation Committee and the Public Accounts Committee - noting that last week the Public Accounts Committee resolved to undertake an inquiry into the economic and health expenditure response for the COVID-19 pandemic. The broad ranging

powers that are available to the Public Accounts Committee enable it to inquire into the matters more broadly around the Government's response and, importantly, the ministerial directions that are being issued, are being inquired into by the Subordinate Legislation Committee. So, we have two standing committees that are both inquiring into the Government's response -

Ms O'Connor - With no specific reference to the response.

Mr GUTWEIN - Both inquiring into the response relating to the pandemic. Furthermore, and I will come back to this point, when the calls for additional scrutiny first arose it was as a result of the parliament not sitting. Yet, what is occurring now, is the parliament is sitting. In fact, the only divergence from the parliament's sitting schedule is that the Budget session has been moved to later in the year on the basis of needing to fall after the Commonwealth budget so that we have clarity of what our major revenue streams are going to be.

My ministers and I have appeared before the Subordinate Legislation Committee and will continue to do so. Also, I spoke personally with the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and offered myself and the secretary of Treasury to discuss the economic and fiscal update that I recently released. At the time we released our economic and fiscal update, no other state had provided a fiscal update. What we did was to provide the greatest level of clarity of the impact of the previous months on the economy and, importantly, on the Government's finances. We provided that clarity and transparency.

The Public Accounts Committee has now resolved to have a broad-ranging inquiry into the Government's response. As I noted yesterday, as the Public Accounts Committee can call for persons and papers, and can also follow the money, the Government's response -

Mr O'Byrne - We cannot get a letter from you around the Tamar Valley Power Station.

Mr GUTWEIN - Do not devalue your efforts on the Public Accounts Committee.

Dr Broad - You will not produce letters to defend your position on energy.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, please.

Mr GUTWEIN - The Public Accounts Committee has an inquiry afoot on this particular matter to inquire into our response to COVID-19. I say to those opposite, on one hand when the parliament was not sitting they called for greater scrutiny. This Government heard that call and we brought the parliament back.

Mr O'Byrne - Every other state has done this, come on.

Mr GUTWEIN - We brought the parliament back and I have taken questions on every day that the parliament sat, on any subject. In terms of transparency, no government has ever stood before the people, day by day, by day -

Members interjecting.

Mr GUTWEIN - I thought you might be interested in our response. Every day, I have made myself and my Health minister available, and other ministers if necessary, to take questions at those media conferences, wide ranging on any matter.

To argue that there is a need for a third committee over and above the two that are currently in place, and the fact that the parliament is sitting on its previous schedule apart from, as I have said, the Budget session which, for obvious reasons, will make for a very busy end of year period. I believe, quite frankly, it is driven by politics. It was a very tight vote in the upper House last night, and I can assure you that it is the Government's view, like those members last night who voted against this, that there is no requirement for this additional committee.

The other point that I will make is that the pandemic is still with us. Importantly, we need to ensure that those people who are doing the heavy lifting, especially our public health officials, and those who are managing our Health department, whilst noting that I am certain that they will need to appear before Public Accounts committee if required - as I took the secretary of DPAC with me - if secretaries are required to appear before the Subordinate Legislation Committee, they will make themselves available. They will answer questions.

It now appears that what others want to do is to put another requirement on them to probably ask them the same questions but in another forum. That does not make sense -

The Government is proud of its response to COVID. We have worked very hard to keep Tasmanians safe. We are happy with the scrutiny that is occurring. What is being argued for here is unnecessary. The processes that are in place - the parliament and the two standing committees - provide an unprecedented level of scrutiny into a government's actions.

For the public watching this today I argue that we have been very transparent, we have been very open and we continue to be so. We will present to the parliament, to the Subordinate Legislation Committee and the Public Accounts Committee and we will answer the questions on the Government's response. If the Public Accounts Committee wants to hear from people affected by COVID, whether they be engaged in a government department or in the community, then it has that opportunity. It can send for papers and persons. That mechanism is there.

Ms O'Connor - It does not have a specific reference on COVID.

Mr GUTWEIN - You know that that is there and available to the Public Accounts Committee. The Subordinate Legislation Committee can send for persons and papers as well. Both of those committees have all the necessary mechanisms available to them.

Ms Standen - Only for notices.

Mr GUTWEIN - I hear Ms Standen raise 'only for notices' regarding ministerial directions. On COVID-19 the Public Accounts Committee has broad-ranging powers. We have a member there. Whether you will exercise your powers and use the mechanisms available to you is a matter for you.

Mr O'Byrne - For example, if you want to be transparent, what about the letter that you refused to give the committee on the sale of the Tamar Valley Power Station? That is your track record.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, Mr O'Byrne.

Mr GUTWEIN - I will come back to where I started. From day one we have been transparent, we have been accountable, and we have made ourselves available. We have brought the parliament back when the calls were that there needed to be additional scrutiny. We are presenting and are

prepared to continue to present to the two committees that are looking into the COVID-19 matters. We will make ourselves willingly available.

To establish a third committee above two very powerful committees is simply politics being played. The mechanisms are there. I say to those on the other side calling for a third level of scrutiny, or a fourth level of scrutiny, use the mechanisms that are available within the two committees already.

My aim is to keep our public health officials, the senior people in Health, those who have been involved in our response through other services, focused firmly on keeping Tasmanians safe. There are plenty of forums available already for them to be called and to answer questions. I encourage the parliament to use those forums as opposed to putting in place another committee above two very powerful committees, which already have the powers to do the job that this proposed committee would do.

Our side of the House will not be supporting this. We view it as unnecessary. We have been transparent and accountable, and we will continue to be so. We will make ourselves available to those two committees, which have the power to send for persons and papers and can call anyone before them, whether it be a member of the public, a member of Government or a member of another agency.

[11.25 a.m.]

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Madam Speaker, I am very disappointed in the Premier's response. He knows the two standing committees he refers to are not undertaking their work in full view of the public, nor can members of the community make submissions and have their matters heard. It is not just about the Government. It is about what is happening across the state and the community, and how individuals have been impacted: families, businesses; a whole range of sectors of our economy and our society.

It is not just a committee that has been proposed by Ms Webb to look at the response of the Government. It is actually the response of the state -

Mr Gutwein - Name one of those people you have just mentioned that those committees could not call.

Ms WHITE - They are not calling for public submissions from the community. They are not advertising for the community to make their submissions known to the work of those committees. The pertinent point here is that Tasmania is in a very enviable position. Australia is. We have the luxury of time. Through the actions the Government has taken across the country there are very few active cases. The response of the health system can be ramped up should it need to. We now have a window of opportunity and the luxury of time to examine what has occurred should there be a second wave. We would be negligent if we did not use this opportunity to make sure we are doing everything possible; that we are learning everything we can about the response so far to prepare this state and our country should there be a second wave.

We are very fortunate. I give credit to the Government for the actions it has taken to save lives and get the state to the position it is in. Let us use this opportunity. The proposed committee of inquiry supported by the members of the upper House is a joint House inquiry. It gives broad enough scope to examine a range of measures relating to the COVID response, it supports examination of how we can be better prepared and how to learn from this.

As the Premier pointed out, this is going to go on for a while yet. The pandemic is still with us. It is unlikely to be resolved for many years, until there is a vaccination, if there is a vaccination. Applying that logic the Premier would never support a committee like this. That does not seem consistent with what the community wants, which is to have their voices heard. We raise their concerns in this House. We raised them at question time today and were told by the Premier that we should not be raising their concerns. Instead we should be writing to him. A committee of inquiry would give our community the opportunity to have their voices heard.

I commend the member for Nelson for the work she has done in preparing the debate on this matter. She has written to members of this Chamber and members of the other place. She has provided a well-researched document that provides a jurisdictional comparison which illustrates that Tasmania and Western Australia are the only two jurisdictions in our country that do not have a committee of inquiry set up specifically to look at the COVID response. Western Australia increased the number of parliamentary sitting days so they could have greater scrutiny and accountability of government decisions.

While parliament has returned in Tasmania we all know this is a truncated version of the parliament. There is no private members' time. We cannot bring matters to the Floor for debate. There is no capacity for other members, apart from Government members, to set the agenda. The only reason the Government recalled parliament was to deal specifically with COVID-related matters, to respond to the emergency. We supported that but it is not accurate to say that the Premier recalled the parliament and we are sitting like we normally would because we are not. There is not even any other business on the blue today, so after this matter is dealt with we presumably adjourn. It is a very truncated version of an ordinary parliament.

The letter that was drafted and sent by the independent member for Nelson sets out very well the arguments for why a committee of inquiry like this would work well in Tasmania. I will quote from it because it is important to note. The member for Nelson says:

Tasmania need not be deprived of a similar positive opportunity to, through a formal parliamentary process, capture, record and review the relative success story that has been our state's response to the COVID-19 crisis. The Tasmanian Parliament sitting days scheduled in June are the timely opportunity for a collaborative approach in both houses for the establishment of a Joint Select Committee. This would allow the committee to convene and begin its work during our Parliamentary winter recess.

We have time to do this work and we have an opportunity to do this work before we come back for the August session. It would give a chance for the community of Tasmania to have their voices heard. The member goes on to say:

I would expect that a government which has publicly welcomed the idea of scrutiny and accountability would embrace the responsibility to put in place a standard, respected parliamentary mechanism to deliver this.

The member goes on further to say:

The Tasmanian community have heard a lot from government these last few months. I believe it is time to now hear from Tasmanians, by providing a formal and accountable democratic platform by which they can share their experiences, fears, frustrations and hopes.

I believe the Tasmanian community would welcome this move, and see it as a reassuring strengthening of our democracy. Further, there are key stakeholders across all facets of the Tasmanian community who would value the opportunity to contribute to a formal parliamentary process. They would do so knowing that their experience and insight would become a matter of public record and would enhance the understanding, scrutiny and analysis of the COVID-19 period and assist in future preparedness for other challenges our state may face.

Madam Speaker, I found those arguments compelling. They seem sensible. They are not politically driven. In fact, it is about making sure that we support our community now and in the future should we face such a similar circumstance again. Given the commentary around a second wave and what we can see occurring across the rest of the world, we have to be very open-minded to that possibility occurring here, so we should take this opportunity to make sure we can learn everything possible and be as prepared as possible should that unfortunate outcome occur in our state.

To some of the points the Premier made in defence of his position, which is to not agree with the motion, he pointed to the standing committees that are currently in session but the Subordinate Legislation Committee does not have the power to inquire into public health directives or emergency management directives. As we all know, they are the directives that deal with quite a lot of the very significant decisions this Government is making, the majority of them and, at the moment, there is no ability to scrutinise those directives. The Premier knows that. Whilst the Public Accounts Committee is also in session now and has an inquiry, it has a very narrow scope. They are closed deliberations.

Madam Speaker, the fact is the Public Accounts Committee has a very narrow scope. It is limited to expenditure. They are closed deliberations. If nothing else -

Mrs Rylah - No, you are wrong.

Ms WHITE - Am I wrong? They are not closed deliberations? They are public deliberations, are they?

Mrs Rylah - I have been asking for public submissions and information.

Ms WHITE - And will the deliberations be made in public view?

Mrs Rylah - Deliberations as in the decisions when the report is printed? Yes, it will be public.

Mr Ferguson - It's up to the committee, as the Leader should know.

Ms WHITE - It sounds to me like there is confusion on the Government benches about whether the Public Accounts Committee can actually hear from the public, in public. It is unclear whether the public submissions can be heard in public.

Let us clear this matter up once and for all by supporting the motion that has come from the upper House, and has been agreed to by the upper House, to make sure that submissions from the community can be called for across a broad spectrum of interests and that they are not defined or

limited to a very narrow scope. Arguing that the Public Accounts Committee is going to be able to do the work that has been proposed to be undertaken by this joint House inquiry is simply not true. They are looking at the financial impacts of COVID-19 and the expenditure-related items, and we know the impacts have been far more widely felt than that. We also need to learn from what has been done so that we can plan for the future. At the end of the day, we are very fortunate that we have the privilege of time right now to be able to do this work in consultation with the broader Tasmanian community to make sure we are as prepared as possible should there be a second wave.

The Government should not have any fear of accountability or undertaking this work in a transparent way or fearing scrutiny. The Premier said he is proud of the response of his Government. Therefore, there should be no fear of scrutiny from a parliamentary inquiry at all. I cannot understand the reluctance and hesitation from the Government in agreeing to the motion that has come from the upper House. Therefore, I move an amendment to the motion as put by the Premier, which is that he would not agree to an inquiry. I am looking at the Clerk to make sure I get this right - or do we just vote against it? I was going to move that the words 'not be agreed to' be substituted with the words 'agreed to'.

We can move an amendment in parliament to make it very clear that what we are doing here is voting for the upper House's motion.

Madam SPEAKER - This is a black-and-white question so if you do not want to support it, just vote against it.

Ms WHITE - To make that clear then, because it seems like a bit of a backward thing to do, in voting against the motion we will actually be voting for the motion from the upper House to establish an inquiry. It is a back-to-front way to do things but our position is that we support the upper House inquiry and we seek the support of other members in this place in that endeavour as well.

[11.37 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Premier, your stubborn, combative nature has let you down. I know it has got you this far but it is not always a strength. This is one of those situations where it is no skin off your nose, no skin off your Government's nose, to accept that the upper House, by majority vote, has expressed a view. I have read today's reports of the vote last night and my understanding is that a joint select inquiry with a specific reference is supported not only by a majority of members in the other place, it is supported by Labor, the Greens and Ms Ogilvie.

Ms Ogilvie - Hang on, I haven't spoken yet.

Ms O'CONNOR - Ms Ogilvie, I can only go on the reports I have read in the paper that say you support an independent inquiry.

Ms Ogilvie - Who also actually did not speak to me. I will speak after you.

Ms O'CONNOR - So you do not support a specific inquiry?

Ms Ogilvie - I will speak after you.

Ms O'CONNOR - So you are going to vote for the Liberals one more time, just for something completely different?

Madam Speaker, I digress, but the media reports are that an inquiry with a specific reference into the pandemic response is supported by a majority of members across both Houses, but we will see when the vote comes because Ms Ogilvie obviously has form in consistently backing the Government with every single vote unless it has no consequence whatsoever.

This has come down to the Premier's stubbornness. We are about to enter the winter break and it is an excellent opportunity for a joint select committee with a specific reference to call for public submissions. It is disingenuous to say the Public Accounts Committee or the Subordinate Legislation Committee can call for submissions, because they have not been asked to. The Premier has not written to the PAC saying they should probably hear from Tasmanians. The point of a joint select inquiry with a specific reference is that it gives an opportunity for people to submit.

What really baffles me - and it troubles me to say this - is you have done a really good job, so what is the problem with having a parliamentary inquiry? We have had 19 days straight of zero cases and we have three active cases. It is widely acknowledged that Public Health did an outstanding job containing the outbreak in the north-west. It is widely acknowledged that you, as Premier, and the Health minister have done a good job. I would have thought that the showman in you might think, 'Actually, a joint select inquiry where we can present what a terrific job we did might not be a bad idea; we don't even need to write Dorothy Dix questions, we'll have our members on there'. I thought you would have said, 'Yes, why not?'. It comes down to stubbornness and the reason that it is -

Mr Ferguson - You're trying to hypnotise people.

Ms O'CONNOR - Who, me? I cannot see, I do not have my glasses on, so if you're hypnotised I am going beautifully.

The issue here is that, in all seriousness, there is a risk - and we are all concerned about it - of a devastating second and third wave and parliament should have the capacity, with a specific reference into the COVID response, to seek submissions, speak to health professionals and medical experts and make sure we have a rock-solid preparedness in the event of a second or third wave of coronavirus on this island. A parliamentary inquiry can be a positive process of pulling together all the information that relates to the response, hearing from people who otherwise would not be given an opportunity to feed in, hearing from families who have been affected, hearing from health experts, and preparing almost a template of recommendations for the parliament and the Government, drawing on the work that was done to nearly eradicate the virus from this island and ensuring we do very well should there be a second or third wave.

I point out to the Premier - and I know he thinks this is just us bleating - that the Greens are not on the Subordinate Legislation Committee or the Public Accounts Committee, yet I look around this Chamber and see only one epidemiologist in here and that is Dr Woodruff. What a skill set that would be to have on a parliamentary committee working in a constructive and collaborative way to help the Government make sure it is extra ready should there be a second or third wave, none of which we want to see.

Premier, if you are so certain that Public Accounts or Subordinate Legislation has the capacity to do this I encourage you to write to the Public Accounts Committee with a specific reference and ask them to seek public submissions -

Mr Gutwein - They are about to advertise.

Ms O'CONNOR - The problem is, Premier, and you know this, that the job of the Public Accounts Committee is to examine public expenditure; that is what they are set up for. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has the role, albeit nobbled in the emergency, of looking at government audits or notices. There is no reference to either of those standing committees that specifically deals with the COVID response. I do not understand what you are worried about. It would take very little time away from Public Health officials. I cannot recall what the reporting date is on the motion but, for example, the notice of motion we tabled to establish a committee on 30 April this year, without fanfare, had a reporting date of 30 June next year - plenty of time.

I still remain vaguely hopeful that the votes will fall the right way in this place this morning because it is just the work of the parliament. This is the single biggest event that has happened in Tasmania since the Second World War. We have handed more power to government as a parliament, and entrusted government with that power, than any parliament since the Second World War, so parliament should have a role here, working together across both Houses in good faith on behalf of the people of Tasmania to examine the COVID response and make recommendations.

Premier, I believe you have let yourself down this time because you have dug in. You have to know when to hold them and when to fold them, and I would have thought with this one you would just say, 'Actually it might be a positive exercise, I can appear before that committee and look pretty damn good', but no. You have let yourself down and I think it is a rare blunder on your part politically.

We will not be supporting the motion to not agree. I have not been in this place where we have had a motion where the upper House expressed a view by majority vote for there to be a joint select committee and the lower House said no. I have not experienced that before and it is regrettable.

Let us see how the vote goes and let us see if we can make sure that there is an inquiry with a specific reference where the people of Tasmania are asked if they want to submit, and medical professionals and health experts can feel safe in coming along and presenting to that inquiry. At the moment we have closed inquiries. They are not even specific inquiries; they are just standing committees that have some work to do. This process is happening largely beyond public view and out of the public's sight and mind.

Good on you, Premier, for fronting up to 70 press conferences since the emergency was declared. There have been some mornings when I have wondered how you have done it. It is not the same as giving people a voice. Given the sacrifices that the people of Tasmania have made over the past few months, and are making, providing that open opportunity to examine the COVID-19 response and to hear from people is the very least we can do.

[11.48 a.m.]

Ms OGILVIE (Clark) - Madam Speaker, it is good to see a good mood in the House for this sort of discussion because it helps all of us to ventilate the issues. It is clear to me that the Government has done a fantastic job in managing this crisis, as has everybody in this House. It has been a very difficult time. The leadership of the Premier has clearly been outstanding. I agree that

the Premier has been very transparent in his willingness to stand in front of the media in the middle of a crisis. That, and bringing his ministers along as he has needed is hard to do. He stood there and answered questions virtually every day for the past three months and that effort has been as unprecedented as this virus itself.

I also commend the Premier for listening and bringing the parliament back. We are all very pleased about that, even though it is in a scaled-back format. I know that the Premier has offered to appear before the Public Accounts Committee, and the Subordinate Legislation Committee has also been examining decisions taken by Government. I am not a member of any committee in this House and so for me parliament is where it is at. His Executive Government has performed brilliantly, but in my heart I am a strong believer in our Westminster style of government and the need for parliament to ultimately be supreme in overseeing the work of the Executive. It is possible for the Premier and the Government to walk and chew gum at the same time, particularly now that the worst of the virus seems to have passed.

It is important not only that the actions of the Executive are properly scrutinised but that the broader community be given the opportunity to give their feedback - what went well, what did not and what can be done better if, heaven forbid, there is a next time.

I will be voting in support of the inquiry. I have some libertarian leanings. I like our Westminster system. I support representative democracy. I believe we need to consider the social contract that we make with the people of Tasmania to represent them in this place. I am on the record and have been consistent about wanting parliament back in its full scope as soon as possible to ensure that our prime democratic institution, the Parliament of Tasmania, has carriage of our democracy in full.

[11.51 a.m.]

Ms HADDAD (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I rise to put on the record my thoughts about the message we are debating. I support the establishment of a joint House committee and agree with the speakers who have come before me.

There is no reason not to do this. It is baffling that the Government would not agree to setting up a joint House parliamentary inquiry. We have heard the arguments from the Premier that there are already adequate forms of scrutiny and that he has brought back parliament. Many of us pushed for parliament to be brought back. It has been brought back with limited sittings and with fewer sitting days. Many of the normal forms of the House are suspended.

Today in question time we were chastised like naughty children for raising issues on behalf of constituents, on behalf of businesses, on behalf of the Tasmanian community. If we are not here as local members to raise those issues, and represent our electorates, what are we here for? We are here to raise issues on behalf of our communities.

The Standing Committees that are looking at parts of the response to COVID-19 - the Subordinate Legislation and the Public Accounts committees - have very limited scope. They cannot look at the decisions of the Government in the way that a select committee of both Chambers would be able to do. They can look at things within the scope of their terms, within the scope of the legislation that set up their committee and the precedent that has gone before them. We know in particular with the Subordinate Legislation Committee it has a very limited scope. It has been confirmed that their scope is limited. They cannot look at many of the decisions that have been made, in particular public health directives and emergency management directives. Those are the

main directives by which executive Government has made decisions to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. They are decisions that we have supported as a parliament but they are not within the scope of the Subordinate Legislation Committee. That has been confirmed throughout this process.

The Premier rightly said the pandemic is still upon us. Members have already said we are hoping against hope and doing everything we can. I pay my respects to the people working in Public Health having done an outstanding job here in Tasmania to stem the spread of the virus and to keep this state safe. They have done an outstanding job, but it is still upon us.

We are all fearful of a second or, God forbid, a third wave. In the winter recess parliament will not be sitting. We are happy to continue sitting throughout the winter break but that has been rejected by the Government. It is still imperative that there is parliamentary scrutiny. Not just Executive scrutiny or Executive Government decisions when it comes to dealing with COVID-19 but that there is parliamentary scrutiny.

The Premier also said he has been transparent and stood in front of the media each day. That is true. There have been thorough briefings to the media, which have been broadcast publicly. He said that is unprecedented. It is not. Every other premier and territory leader has done the same, as has the Prime Minister. They are all standing in front of their communities, in front of the media each day, to explain the restrictions, the case numbers and the specific issues that their state, territory or the Commonwealth is dealing with, yet they have all established committees to look at the decisions of government in a way that their select committees cannot. The exception is Western Australia, which, as Ms Webb explained in her letter to the Premier and to other members of the House, has increased its parliamentary sittings by 25 per cent. We have not done that.

I wonder why we are the exception when all of the Premier's counterparts, including his Liberal premier counterparts sitting around that National Cabinet table, are busily establishing committees. Every other state has either set up a new committee or they have empowered an existing committee with a specific reference from government to look at the decisions made during the pandemic: not just to scrutinise but also to prepare us for the future so that if something like this happens again we are better prepared to deal with it.

In my wildest dreams I never thought I would quote the words of Mathias Cormann in this place. I am going to do that now. Upon the establishment of a select Senate committee to look at COVID-19 decisions made by the federal government, Mathias Cormann said -

We welcome the scrutiny. We do believe there is a need for scrutiny. We understand and appreciate that, in these extraordinary times, the government has been required to make very significant decisions, and, as one of those senators mentioned earlier, there is no manual on how to deal with this crisis in the best possible way. We're making judgements every single day to the best of our ability -

- the Government's ability, of course.

but it is appropriate that those judgements that we make are scrutinised and challenged to help us make even better decisions as we go along. So it is very important to have in place a committee of the type being proposed by Senator Gallagher ...

- a Labor senator.

Take that leap from the federal government, from their Liberal counterpart, Minister for Finance, Mathias Cormann, and do not say no to a select committee being established to analyse the successes but also hear from the public in a way that those standing committees with their limited scope simply cannot.

I commend the member for Nelson for her power of work in presenting a really strong evidence-based argument to Government about why a committee like this is not about playing politics. It is not about replicating or denigrating or dismissing the work of those select committees, or the work of the parliament. The parliamentary committee system is a vital part of how this parliament works. Every other state and territory, except for Western Australia which has more parliamentary sittings, has a select committee. We should do the same.

[11.58 a.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) - Madam Speaker, I want to address a few of the points in the debate and not stretch the debate longer than it needs to be. There has been some misunderstanding and lack of clarity on a few matters. It is important that the House has a proper view of what is occurring at the moment. Some things have been said in response to the Premier by Ms O'Connor and by the Leader of the Opposition which I want to sort out.

Dr Woodruff - About his ego?

Madam SPEAKER - Order, a little bit of respect, please.

Mr FERGUSON - I have had a look at the Public Accounts Committee Act 1970. It is very clear in section 4(8) that -

The Committee may sit and transact business during any adjournment or recess, and may sit at such times and in such places, and conduct its proceedings in such manner, as it thinks proper.

It is perfectly empowered as a committee to be able to have deliberations in public if that is in the public interest.

Section 7 of the act makes it very clear that evidence shall be taken by the committee in public. Again, open to the public. It is a falsehood made by earlier speakers. Section 7(3) states -

Except where it considers that there is good and sufficient reason to take evidence in private, all evidence shall be taken by the Committee in public.

The House needs to have correct statements being made about these processes, not incorrect statements. Earlier, when the Leader of the Opposition was falsely claiming that it had narrow terms of reference, the member for Braddon, Mrs Rylah, made the point that the terms of reference announced by Ivan Dean, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, had made it very clear that the terms of reference provide in part (4) for any other matter incidental thereto.

The Premier correctly made the point there are two public processes currently under way. We have the Subordinate Legislation Committee. We now have the Public Accounts Committee, which

is a standing committee, with a specific inquiry. It was said earlier by one member that it is not a specific inquiry. It is a specific inquiry and it is the inquiry for the Tasmanian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inquiry terms of reference are public. How do I know that? Because I found it on our parliament's website. It is there for anyone to see. As Ivan Dean had made clear in his statement over the weekend, the public is going to be involved in this. Not only is there the mechanism for public submissions, the committee Chair has said on behalf of that committee that he intends to constantly report back to the public rather than just one big report at the end of the process.

This House is entitled to have an honest discussion about these matters, not one where people are trying to characterise those existing members as not being able to do the job. I fully support what the Premier is doing fully and it is great that some members have found within themselves to say what a great job the Government has done, what a great job the Premier has done. This is not about going before a committee and bragging about a great job. We need to be focused on the task of rebuilding our economy. With those words, I commend the motion to the House.

[12.02 p.m.]

Mr GUTWEIN (Bass - Premier) - Madam Speaker, I will take a moment to sum up.

Ms O'Connor - Collect your thoughts.

Mr GUTWEIN - I will make a point for the member who interjected. You were more persuasive than the others but not persuasive enough. Whilst I was listening to the debate I did take the moment to check and this is the correspondence that Meg Webb sent. Before reading from it, I make the point that the Tasmanian Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts has established an inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If I look to the information that was provided, the New South Wales upper House Standing Public Accountability Committee, which I presume is similar vehicle to PAC, was inquiring on the New South Wales Government's management of COVID-19 pandemic, which is exactly what we are doing. The Parliament of Victoria has a Joint Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, again I imagine with similar powers to our own PAC. They have established an inquiry into the Victorian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, almost identical to what is being announced by the PAC. If I go to the Parliament of Queensland, the Economics and Governance Committee, which I understand is their similar vehicle to our PAC, is looking at the Queensland Government's economic response to COVID-19.

It has been argued this morning that the public should have its say. As the previous speaker, Mr Ferguson, mentioned, on the weekend, Ivan Dean indicated that the public would have their say and I presume would be able to provide submissions and evidence, in public or private, as per the normal machinations of a committee.

I come back to where I started when I first spoke because it appears that, unlike other states and territories, we will actually have two committees looking at the Government's response -

Ms O'Connor - Subordinate Legislation is not looking at the Government's response.

Mr GUTWEIN - Subordinate Legislation is inquiring into the Government's response in terms of the ministerial motions and directions that we have provided, and it has the power to call for persons and papers.

The Public Accounts Committee has indicated that it will have an inquiry as well similar to -

Ms O'Connor - Not representative of the parliament or the expertise in it.

Mr GUTWEIN - That is a different matter. Similar to what has occurred in other states our Public Accounts Committee will be inquiring into the Government's response to COVID-19.

My position and the position of this Government has not changed. There is plenty of opportunity for scrutiny and, as I have indicated, when the issue of a select committee or some form of committee inquiry into COVID-19 was first mooted it was mooted on the basis that the parliament was not sitting. Here we are in parliament today debating that matter. The parliament has sat every week that it was forecast to sit and it is only the Budget session that has been removed, for obvious reasons, in that we need to hold that session post the Commonwealth budget.

As persuasive as Ms O'Connor was, this time you do not have me. I will make the point - and this is a very personal point - there has never been a view certainly in my mind that this was an opportunity for me to take any credit or to enjoy at any time the processes that we have been through. I will not take that opportunity in my presentations to either the Subordinate Legislation or to Public Accounts Committee. This has been -

Ms O'Connor - I was being glib. Not suggesting that, in fact.

Mr GUTWEIN - I thought I should just ensure that the record is clear. We will vote and the House will divide on this particular matter and our position will be clear and so will the position of other members in this House.

I thank members for the work that we did together through this because it has been the most extraordinary period and, as a state, we have come to a position where we are in a pretty good place. We still need to get to a better place and it is important that we are all going to need to work with our constituents to ensure that they follow those simple and basic rules. I expect that this weekend is going to be a bit of a knees-up for people. For those Tasmanians who are watching, I hope that they do not forget that we came very close, as did other states and territories, to the decimation that is occurring in other parts of the world.

I do not know if any of you look at the WHO website of a night and read those daily updates but if you look at what is occurring in Brazil at the moment and the body count that is occurring there, if you look at what is occurring in South Africa at the moment and the challenges that they have, and I would think the significant under-reporting that is going on in Indonesia, this is not over yet. It is going to be with us for some time.

In closing, I thank all of you for the work that we have done together. We are in a good place as a community and let us hope that we can all go forward as a community, albeit we will divide and I am certain that we will not agree on this particular matter.

The House divided -

AYES 11

Ms Archer
Ms Courtney
Mr Ferguson
Mr Gutwein
Mr Jaensch
Mrs Petrusma
Mrs Rylah (Teller)
Mr Rockliff
Mr Shelton
Mr Street
Mr Tucker

NOES 11

Dr Broad
Ms Butler
Ms Dow (Teller)
Ms Haddad
Ms Houston
Mr O'Byrne
Ms O'Connor
Ms Ogilvie
Ms Standen
Ms White
Dr Woodruff

PAIRS

Mr Barnett

Ms O'Byrne

Madam SPEAKER - The result of the division is 11 Ayes and 11 Noes. Therefore, under Standing Order 167, I cast my vote. As has been tradition in this position, I give a reason for why I have cast my vote.

I do beg of the House to hear me out. Previously when I have given a decision there has been gnashing of teeth and throwing of papers, et cetera, et cetera, and I am asking for all the passion in the room just to remain calm.

As everyone would know I have been on record as a vehement critic of the Government, often referred to as a rebel or a rogue, and lots of other things less pleasant. But, in this particular case, I do support the strong transparency and appropriate scrutiny of the Government and its actions, and also the support of the other parties and Independent in making sure that Tasmania got through this dreadful situation.

We have all heard and seen the Premier provide a significant level of accessibility and accountability to the Tasmanian community and not only that but to each of the Leaders, to Ms Ogilvie and to myself, taking phone calls at all sorts of strange hours of the day and night.

After being adjourned until August, the parliament was recalled early and I believe on the urging of the opposition parties and the Independent as well. Thank you for that. Only four parliamentary sitting days have been lost when compared to the original sitting schedule for the year.

I am aware that the Joint Standing Committee on Subordinate Legislation is regularly scrutinising all notices made under COVID emergency legislation. The committee is chaired by the Deputy President of the Legislative Council, the Honourable Ruth Forrest MLC, who I think we all agree is a formidable fellow champion of good governance and scrutiny. The committee is conducting regular inquiries and the Premier has already appeared before it along with other

ministers and departmental officials and, most importantly, he has committed to appear whenever requested again.

The Government has also committed to a separate independent inquiry to the north-west outbreaks, and the Premier has also committed to appear before the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts at regular intervals on an ongoing basis and did so recently with the Secretary of Treasury. I am informed that these are the most powerful committees within the parliamentary system. I also note that a number of other jurisdictions across Australia are also using standing committees similar to the function of our joint Public Accounts Committee to conduct their inquiries into government responses.

Given that the Public Accounts Committee is the only joint House committee of this parliament with its own enabling legislation, and is well supported by the Auditor-General of Tasmania, it is the most powerful committee of this parliament, and I have full confidence in its operations.

With this in mind another new select committee as per the upper House motion, which I totally commend Ms Webb for bring this on; I am a huge believer in scrutiny and accountability and I think my record would state that, but I am in a situation where we have had scrutiny by the media over and over, we have had scrutiny here on the Floor, and I believe there are sufficient scrutiny and accountability mechanisms already in place.

What I truly believe is that the mum and dad voters want us to rebuild this state and return Tasmania to the Tasmanian place we know and love, to get people back to work, to get them into homes, all of the things which I commend everyone on this side for supporting. We cannot be distracted by a fourth inquiry. It would be expensive and wasteful.

Ms O'Connor - It is not a distraction, for heaven's sake.

Madam SPEAKER - I commend your passion, so I will forgive you.

We have to rebuild this economy and no minute should be lost in doing so. On that basis I will be supporting the Government and I cast my vote with the Ayes.

Ms O'Connor - All stitched up before 10 a.m. this morning, wasn't it? All stitched up.

Madam SPEAKER - I take personal offence at that because there has been nothing stitched up. You are taking umbrage and criticising my personality. I think you would know how hard -

Ms O'Connor - No I am not. It is a carefully prepared statement.

Madam SPEAKER - Of course it is carefully prepared that I have written with Merv. Thank you.

Ms O'Connor - Before 10 this morning.

Madam SPEAKER - I does not matter. I have been scribbling on it, writing on it. You will not criticise the Chair and nor will you reflect on my integrity. Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

SITTING DATES

[12.19 p.m.]

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

That the House at its rising adjourn till Wednesday 24 June next at 10 a.m.

Motion agreed.

ADJOURNMENT

[12.19 p.m.]

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

That the House do now adjourn.

In accordance with the sessional order we will now proceed to the COVID-19 MPI.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

COVID-19 Emergency

[12.20 p.m.]

Ms STANDEN (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I rise with pleasure to make a contribution on the matter of public importance. Today of course it is on COVID-19 but I speak in relation to the important area of housing and homelessness. The Government has made a significant announcement today to finally recognise the calls from the community and the research sector to recognise social housing as essential infrastructure. That is welcome because those calls not only lead to a more equitable society with putting roofs over people's heads but it has also been proven as a way to attract private investment into the important area of affordable housing.

Although the Government has announced some 2300 new dwellings in the social and affordable housing space, the current demand for social and affordable housing prior to this COVID-19 crisis was over 11 000 and projected to grow to something like 15 000 new homes over the coming years. That is a substantial shortfall, particularly when we recognise that the wait list for social housing in this state is almost 3500 applications, representing the average 2.3 people per household. That means that somewhere approaching perhaps 10 000 people are badly awaiting a roof over their heads from the social housing sector. The average wait time - and this is for priority applicants only - is 65 weeks, so well over a year for priority applicants, which is a very long time indeed for those people in the direst of circumstances.

This means that there is effectively a squeeze. If we think about it, it is a flawed model, I suppose, but I have heard the housing system described as a ladder where those at the top achieve the great Australian dream of home ownership. It is projected that over the coming years, particularly coming out of this COVID-19 crisis, the proportion of home ownership is expected to drop to record lows of around 50 per cent. That means people on lower incomes in particular miss out on that opportunity to purchase and ultimately own their home, which means that at the age of retirement it puts more pressure on the welfare system. Not only that, but if those people in moderate to low income brackets cannot get into their first new home, then they are looking, as the

one in four households are currently looking, for housing in the private rental market. We know that in recent years there has been incredible pressure on private rental in Hobart in particular but also statewide in regional Tasmania, with increases of up to 40 per cent in recent years.

A member - But now with access to \$45 000.

Ms STANDEN - Accessing additional funding for the First Home Owner Grant or the First Home Builders Grant - whatever the Government is calling it - will be a welcome opportunity for those people. However, there is concern within the housing sector that home owner grants on their own can be inflationary. Rather than offering more homes for more people they tend to be pitching to those people who have more savings in the bank or who are well progressed to build a new home. This is because people need to begin construction in the next three months and they have two years to complete. I am not criticising that fact but it tends, historically at least, to be the fact that that additional stimulus in the form of \$20 000, or in this case an additional plus \$25 000, could potentially lead to an increase in house valuation and prices that ultimately will mean that fewer and fewer people in that private rental market can aspire to home ownership.

That puts downward pressure on the market, particularly as private rental prices go up and up as they have over the last few years. Short-stay accommodation has added to that tightness in the market and that means there are fewer and fewer homes at higher and higher prices. People in the bottom and second-bottom quintile of income distribution are shut out of the private rental market and fall into homelessness - that bottom rung of the ladder - or even on to the streets.

In the homelessness space we have only old data from the 2016 Census to rely upon, with some 1600 people in homelessness, but experts believe that that is even higher. A rough estimate at the moment is that there are around 150 rough sleepers in the Greater Hobart area alone. Those figures have been increasing over the last five to 10 years and it is a significant issue that we need to address.

All of these measures in terms of stimulus will assist with home ownership. In particular, I welcome the additional funding into the HomeShare program, home equity and the change to income thresholds. I am interested to look at the detail of that.

In relation to social housing investment, we need to ensure that there is capacity to deliver because, as I have tried to outline in previous contributions, the fact is that the Government, particularly in the first term, fell significantly behind in its program for delivery and now we need to see that the community housing provider sector has capacity to deliver, because I am not sure that there is sufficient land available, let alone equity, to contribute to this ambitious program.

Time expired.

[12.27 p.m.]

Mr SHELTON (Lyons - Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management) - Madam Speaker, I would like to talk about the infrastructure investments of this Government. As we all know, our state, like the rest of the world, has been upended by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At this critical time, all levels of government need to share the heavy lifting to support our community or our communities and our economy to recover.

Councils have been playing their part and stepping up to do their bit to support local businesses and ratepayers by providing a range of relief measures. To support council in their efforts the Tasmanian Government has established a no-interest loans scheme. Today I am pleased to say that

due to the program's success the Government is increasing the total borrowing funds available to the sector from \$150 million to \$200 million. A total \$147 million worth of economic stimulus and recovery projects for 20 local government authorities across the state has been approved so far, with the program remaining open for further applications until 1 August.

The program provides for loan interest rebates for three years and will cover upgrades, renovations and maintenance on existing local government infrastructure, as well as other measures councils are taking to respond to the impact of COVID-19. To date the approvals for the loans have been widespread across the state, with more than \$33.8 million to be spent by the councils in the north-west of the state, \$32.5 million worth of loans have been approved for the north and \$80.5 million in the south.

The types of projects for which the loans have been approved to date include \$59.3 million for property improvements, \$46.2 million for road, bridge and jetty improvements, \$16.5 million for rate relief, \$15.4 million to fund cash flow shortfalls and other operational initiatives and \$9.4 million for stormwater infrastructure improvements. This line of finance for the local government sector will provide a much-needed boost to local communities recovering from COVID-19. The Department of Treasury and Finance will be placing further details in relation to approved loans on the website this week at www.treasury.tas.gov.au.

Another key focus of the Government is supporting emergency service workers who support us. Remote area policing is a critical role of the Tasmanian Police and housing in good condition encourages police officers and their families to live and stay in our country areas. This is not only great for the local police officers; it is also great for the local community and great for the construction industry.

The Tasmanian Government is the strongest supporter of Tasmania Police. We have already made significant investments over both terms of government to upgrade police housing across Tasmania. Today's announcement, as part of our infrastructure investment package, confirms we will complete the upgrades of all police housing across Tasmania by June 2022. This commitment represents an injection of \$8.7 million into the funding to finish the upgrades of the final 29 houses over the next two years. These 29 houses are located in various regional areas around Tasmania. This will provide a significant economic stimulus to a number of regional Tasmanian communities and businesses.

The current locations and number of residences that will be upgraded are as follows: two houses in Alonnah, two in Nubeena, two in Scottsdale, five in Smithton, one in Dover, one in Geeveston, one in Currie, one at St Marys, two in Campbell Town, three in Oatlands, one at Kempton, one at Rosebery, two in Queenstown, one at Richmond, one at Ringarooma, one at Fingal, one at Maydena and another one at Woodbridge.

With today's injection of a further \$8.7 million we have total investment of \$21.7 million since 2015-16 for police officers and their families stationed in our remote regions or regional areas of Tasmania. It is a boost to the communities that they serve. Combined, this has seen significant upgrades to over 30 police residences since this ambitious capital program began. Our significant police housing infrastructure spend is in addition to \$7 million which will be provided to undertake infrastructure upgrades and accommodation renovations to the Launceston Police Station.

I thank all our 1325 police officers for the fantastic job they do in protecting us and keeping us safe. Their dedication and contribution to our community every day ensures that Tasmania remains

the best and one of the safest places in Australia to live and raise a family. Tasmanians are truly resilient. We have been forced to respond to an extremely challenging and unprecedented situation these past couple of months. We have come together to keep our community safe.

To the vast majority of Tasmanians who have responded to the emergency rules and continued to do the right thing to protect their wellbeing, the wellbeing of their families and that of the broader community, I say thank you. It is fantastic that Tasmanians will once again be able to enjoy their local pub and visit their favourite restaurants this long weekend with stage 2 restrictions brought forward from Friday. I thank all those emergency services personnel.

Time expired.

[12.34 p.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that the position Tasmania is in at the moment is far better than what we could have imagined heading into what was a massive disruption in late March. There is no doubt we have come through this period of time not only as an island state but as an island nation. We have done extraordinarily well to work cooperatively across the island to respond.

At the forefront of our minds we have always had the best interest of the community at heart. We are in a good spot. We have all worked very hard. We had a couple of tough moments and it was a pity that we were not able to get the motion up. I will not reflect on the vote of the House but it is important that we reflect on the goodwill in the community and the goodwill towards the role of government. We should acknowledge that our health workers and our departments have worked day and night to respond.

We should not reflect necessarily on the bullet that was dodged but we should talk about the experience we had. Given the experience on the north-west coast - the Premier referred to it - we were very fortunate. Tasmania still had the highest per capita death rate of any state. We had the highest contraction rate of any state. We had to bring in the military to decamp two public and one private hospital for a clean. We should not gloss over that. I do not want to dwell on it and do not want to say anything in a way that is political. However, once we get through this period we need to reflect on how and why that happened and learn together as a parliament and a community. Nobody expects a pandemic but having had time in government and being Emergency Services minister, I know we always prepared for it. We are in a much better place. People have said to me that we were lucky not to be in government having to deal with this problem. These are the times you want to be in government, to have some level of influence and control in decision making.

Opposition members worked extraordinarily hard to influence and have discussions with ministers, with the Premier's office and with the Premier to try to resolve issues and fix some of the loopholes in the programs and initiatives of the Government. I did not hear all of Mr Street's contribution last night but I have had a chance to read it in a draft of *Hansard*. I am disappointed by his characterisation of what we have been doing. He called us a disgrace. He said we were cherry-picking health advice and preying on people's disappointment. That really is offensive to us.

The role of opposition in a time of a pandemic and crisis is always very difficult. We made a strategic decision early on that we would get ahead of the Government in some of the tough decisions, so if the Government made tough decisions like closing down schools, closing our borders and some of the initiatives taken in our health system, we would not criticise it. From late

March through this pandemic we have not criticised the Government publicly. We have openly supported the tough decisions and we have not raised things privately with the Government, either with ministers with people in the Premier's office or with the Premier.

I can understand Mr Street's passion. I can understand the point he was trying to make but we refute what he said. We have made it very clear that we supported the health advice and we have supported all the decisions that have been made. Labor made it clear at the beginning that we would get ahead of the Government with some of the tougher decisions, to take the politics out of those decisions, to make it easier for the Premier to make the tough calls. That does not mean we are silenced as an opposition.

We have a role to play to respectfully raise issues with the Government. We have done that on a number of matters where it has not made sense. For example, the racing industry. I know that is not everyone's cup of tea, but it does provide thousands of jobs across Tasmania. When the industry was closed down we were surprised but we did not criticise the Government, despite the fact that every other state had kept theirs operating, despite the fact that they had managed the health risk. On the chief medical officers' advice in other states the racing industry had continued. We waited for a month before we asked the Premier in parliament whether he had considered a plan for the industry to reopen. We did not criticise the Government at that stage.

When people were losing jobs, people were losing horses and animals to the mainland and trainers were moving. The economic impact was significant. We had raised it privately and publicly with the Premier. That is when we started raising issues in the public domain. We did not cherry-pick. We represented those people who were impacted. We know other industries were allowed to continue to operate; the building industry and others were allowed to continue with the restrictions. The racing industry was proposing that as well.

The reason we raised recreational fishing was not so much that we wanted to cherry-pick a community but they were legitimately raising issues about how they felt they were being unfairly treated. You could put a golf bag in your boot and drive to the other end of the state and play golf but you could not put your boat in the water and essentially go across the river. We saw not a political opportunity, but we saw an inconsistency that impacted on our community. We do not accept Mr Street's criticisms. We are not cherry-picking issues. We are representing our constituents, raising issues privately with the Premier and with the Government initially and, when they are not resolved, giving voice to those members of the community in this House.

It is a legitimate role of opposition. Mr Street should not confuse support for tough decisions for not criticising poor decisions, a risk in inconsistent decisions.

Time expired.

[12.41 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, before I address the subject of this matter of public importance, I want to take issue with a couple of things that Mr O'Byrne said. Horse racing, greyhound racing - industries which lead to the needless suffering of blameless and voiceless animals - is not everyone's cup of tea. Indeed, the industry is losing its social licence following damning exposés on both *Four Corners* and the *7.30 Report* of the cruelty that is inflicted on the animals that provide profit for their owners until they pass their use-by date when many of them are just discarded.

The other issue I want to point out to Mr O'Byrne, pardon our cynicism, when we get frustrated because it seems to us and the Greens that you could not hold the line on COVID-19, you could not hold the line on heeding the public health advice, just as you could not hold the line on pokies when you had a position of principle there. You could not hold the line on major projects when communities around Tasmania were led to believe you might have a slightly stronger and more evidence-based position on the fundamental changes to the Tasmanian planning system, which will alienate people.

We are in a unique time in Tasmania's history. For the first time in a very long time we are effectively sealed off as an island. We have come closer than any Australian state or territory to eradicating the virus from this island and we have seen the people of Tasmania come together to keep each other safe, express their love for each other, and follow the rules and do the right thing. I am sure this Friday afternoon at 3 p.m. you will probably hear the whoops and cheers and the champagne corks popping all across the island and it is a well-deserved early mark. What Tasmanians will be doing is proudly supporting local businesses. I really hope that it is enough to sustain those businesses until we have come through this.

I wanted to make a few brief comments about the housing announcement today. We welcome the commitment to build 2300 new homes. I have some questions about whether the \$100 million allocated as it has been, can deliver the 1000 new homes that we are led to believe it can. I do not know if that is leveraging money or how that might work. On average, to construct a new, quality social and affordable housing home it will cost you somewhere between \$250 000 and \$300 000. We have some questions about the rollout of that money.

The expansion of the HomeShare program, effectively a rent to buy, which is what the Greens have been advocating for since the start of the emergency period, is extremely welcome. New social and affordable housing is also extremely welcome, particularly by the 3478 Tasmanians who are currently at this moment languishing on the housing waiting list and waiting, on average, 65 weeks when they are a priority applicant to be housed.

A housing-led recovery was always the sensible path forward for public infrastructure, public stimulus spending and the question that we have asked the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council to apply every time it is looking at stimulus measures is, what delivers the maximum public benefit? It is very clear in a state where UTAS research tells us we are short about 11 000 homes that maximum public benefit through stimulus funding could be achieved by investing in affordable housing construction, which as we know, will provide that lifeline to skilled people in the building and construction industry in the months ahead as some of those other privately-funded projects come to their conclusion.

I impress upon this House the importance of acknowledging that we have been given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a reset. We have been given an opportunity to tackle chronic and raging inequality in Tasmania where too many people, particularly in rural and regional areas and on urban fringes, are missing out, are socially and economically disadvantaged and trapped in generational disadvantage. We have a moment here and now that we have to seize to break those cycles of disadvantage and give every Tasmanian a fair crack at a really good life, no matter where they live, no matter who their parents, are no matter where they were raised.

We have an opportunity right now with public stimulus funds to invest in the people of Tasmania to restart and make sure people who have been left off the government's agenda, not just this Government, but left off government's agenda for too long, where arms have been thrown up

in the air, too hard, are not left off anymore. We accept that every Tasmanian should be given the opportunity to succeed, to have a quality education and training, to have access to quality health services and, critically, to have a secure and affordable home. We could do that right now at this moment in our history. We can make sure there are no more rough sleepers. We can do this. We can do this as an island community that cares about people and cares about each other as we demonstrated, and as we are demonstrating, over the past three months.

Today's announcement is a very good start. We are still looking at the details. I am not going to give unqualified support but it certainly is an acknowledgment that if you want to tackle multiple challenges, building and construction jobs, social inequality created by the housing shortage and the need to kickstart the economy, then you invest in affordable homes. We would like to have seen more homes go into a rent-to-buy scheme, an expanded HomeShare scheme, but we hope there is flexibility to deliver that in the future.

Time expired.

[12.48 p.m.]

Mrs RYLAH (Braddon) - Madam Speaker, the Liberal Government will build, build, build as we rebuild Tasmania. This aggressive building and construction plan will bring the economic and social recovery this state needs. Why build? Because providing financial stimulus and projects for building and construction is one of best levers to lift aggregate demand. That is, building and construction is the best sector to increase demand and desire for goods and services across the entire community. John Maynard Keynes made the clear link between aggregate demand and unemployment. This is what we are about: lifting jobs and lifting opportunity, lifting the whole community.

This side of the House has returned to parliament with both a strong focus on the actions we need to take as well as those measures we have taken which has brought Tasmania safely through the pandemic so far. Our focus is to reboot the economy and get our state back to the nation-leading position it held before the pandemic. We know this state is facing the second fight of our lives. We will recover in safe steps, working together to rebuild our state. We will do this again. We will deliver and we will take Tasmania back to the fastest-growing economy in the nation.

This morning, the Premier laid out one of the most aggressive construction programs in the state's history, expected to deliver approximately 15 000 jobs. The construction blitz will build on the current Government infrastructure program of \$1.8 billion over the next two years. This brings forward and adds new projects that will underpin and support an estimated construction value of \$3.1 billion over the next two years. Our package will deliver homes, affordable and social housing, as well as private sector builds, community infrastructure like school upgrades and government buildings, roads, irrigation and upgrades to the broad range of essential infrastructure, delivering jobs, confidence, business activity and improvements to the Tasmania we know - a flourishing Tasmania once again.

This construction blitz will be very far-reaching, particularly in Braddon. As we know, Braddon was hit hard with COVID-19 restrictions and businesses there have suffered dramatically because of that. We are addressing those difficult circumstances in Braddon and giving our message loud and clear to support the people in my electorate. We will stimulate businesses as well as provide an unprecedented range of measures to support our community. We will ensure the success of the coastal pathway by bringing forward \$12 million over the next two years to complete the Cooe to Wynyard section. The rail corridor there has been plagued with damage from sea

inundation and erosion issues and this additional funding will fix that roadblock issue on this project. The coastal pathway will be an incredible asset for locals and tourists alike.

Regarding the building of the Devonport High School, \$3.5 million of the \$10.5 million is being brought forward to build a modern learning environment where we can continue to build our community, with a higher retention rate and hundreds of construction jobs. The funding will be used for an upgraded learning environment, support and administration areas.

We are bringing forward the works on the Bass Highway at Boat Harbour as well as funding for the first time \$10 million for the Leith overpass, with the build to begin in spring/summer 2021. These two very important safety upgrades have been strongly sought by those communities. Public buildings are also receiving funding, with \$5.9 million being brought forward for the Burnie Court complex. Upgrades will include many safety features, improved access for people with disabilities and a general upgrade to the facilities to ensure the longevity of the Magistrates and Supreme Court. This asset is key to the fair and accessible delivery of justice in Braddon. The child and family centre in Wynyard is to be completed in 2021-22, another project brought forward, and community consultation will begin for the West Ulverstone community family centre.

The importance of frontline workers has been particularly evident throughout the pandemic and how having first responders in regional areas is a necessity. It is important to retain police families in our regions and to do this we must have modern facilities. To this end we are providing \$8.7 million, as we just heard from the minister, to complete the upgrades of all police housing in Braddon by June 2022, and I heard that there are houses in Smithton, Roseberry and Queenstown. These upgrades will provide much-needed economic stimulus to the regional areas in Tasmania.

One particularly important project being brought forward, about which I am delighted, is the Don Irrigation Scheme in the north-west. The previously announced budget originally attracted \$28.51 million of funding and in our package today the Liberal Government has committed supporting the agriculture industry with an extra \$15 million to meet the increased demand in this scheme. This exceptional project has huge potential to help us lift our agricultural production to the \$1 billion goal by 2050, as well as creating at least 130 jobs when it is a fully functioning scheme.

In housing there are multiple and varied programs and Braddon will benefit from these. I am particularly pleased to see affordable housing receiving \$14 million being brought forward but also an additional \$10 million. In social housing we will invest an additional \$100 million which will benefit Braddon. Further, I am particularly interested in and welcome the announcement of the \$200 million fund from the Retirement Benefits Fund.

Time expired.

ADJOURNMENT

COVID-19 - Effect on Hospitality Sector

[12.55 p.m.]

Ms OGILVIE (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I want to say fantastic job on getting all the infrastructure funding out there and build, build, build, jobs, jobs, jobs - all of that great stuff. I want to get into a little bit of the detail about businesses in my electorate that I have been working with right through this whole crisis, particularly in the restaurant sector. I will never forget the day

we made that decision to close the borders, the flow-on effect of which was to close restaurants and what a devastation that was for everyone. I went out that day after parliament recessed and spoke to many of the owners of those businesses directly who were standing in their restaurants looking really quite shaken. My team and I have worked with them all the way through this period.

Without wanting to skip anyone, they included restaurants such as Blue Eye, Rockwall, Retro, Machine Café; San Churro - one of my kids' favourites - and heading out to North Hobart, Capital, Noodle House and Mother India, which was very involved in helping students and visa workers providing free food and meals. All of the people who own these restaurants are our people; they are our friends and neighbours. Their families are in Hobart and their income was not only severely impacted by what had happened but they were responsible for other people's employment, other people's roles and jobs and livelihoods, and that more than anything they felt very keenly. So we were very happy to work with them to do what we could for their staff and employees, particularly in the very early days of the pandemic when we did not know what response there would be and what funding would be available. It is true to say the Government has done a good job and we all scrambled to help.

There is an issue that we need to look at and I have taken the opportunity to speak with the Government briefly about it. It is something I will need to pursue going forward. It relates to parking in North Hobart. It sounds like a simple thing but the restaurateurs are telling me that now more than ever they need people to come back into their restaurants for sit-down meals. We have all loved to have Uber Eats and to have the food still going and we thank everybody for that, but they need patrons to come back into their restaurants. It is good for their staff, it is good for their profits, it is good for their profit and loss, it is good for morale, and it is good for precincts.

I know this is a Hobart City Council area or remit but it is something we need to think about in relation to how we engage with the gig economy and particularly organisations that are food delivery services, whether they be Uber or other organisations. We need to get a bit better organised around cars that are sitting and waiting to pick up food for delivery services. My understanding is that there is an area at the back behind the main strip that has now been allocated for those food delivery service vehicles, but they are not really in use and there is no actual way of organising that because the cars do not have a sticker on them saying it is a food delivery service and there is no rule under which they can be asked to wait perhaps further away.

Without taking away the great job everybody did - those drivers, the restaurants and everybody during the pandemic - I think now we are going to find that it becomes a point of friction. We need those areas to be available for families and people to park their cars and be able to sit inside restaurants. It is quite a detailed issue. I know it is very much on the minds of the restaurateurs and operators of the restaurants, cafes and shops in that North Hobart area.

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

Ms OGILVIE (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I was talking about the gig economy and what we have had to do with our digital management across the pandemic phase in relation to restaurants and businesses and opening up again and a particular issue we have in North Hobart that I really want to get on the record so that those businesses and the owners I have been speaking with know we are in here fighting for them and understanding their issues.

It is also important to point out that the people doing the deliveries have done a superb job as well. I know they are not hugely well remunerated and it has been a really important part of keeping everybody going during this crisis. I wonder whether the conversation needs to be had between the state Government and the companies that manage that software through which all of this activity occurs around things like parking, workplace health and safety fair remuneration and those sorts of things.

That is what I think we ought to look towards as we come out of this pandemic. There are obviously other lessons we have learnt that could be well applied going forward, particularly with technology, working from home, and all those new arrangements that we had to put in place very quickly but which have suited a lot of people. I look at friends of mine who have been running businesses who were able to send quite a few of their staff home to work from home and that was well regarded, particularly when we were quite frightened and scared in those early stages, but now the coming back from that working from home environment is almost a reverse cultural shock as well.

I believe there is work to do around that. There is some really good thinking that we can do picking up on the innovation of the last few months in making sure our small businesses are patronised and that families come back. In our family there are two adults and three kids and we would happily go and have a pizza in North Hobart or whatever it is, but parking is an issue. Even the parking arrangements where there is only one hour are insufficient.

Time expired.

Housing and Homelessness

[2.34 p.m.]

Ms STANDEN (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I want to continue the points I was making in relation to housing and homelessness when I was speaking earlier on the matter of public importance. I was talking particularly about welcoming the additional investment into social and affordable housing but making the point that given that the current demand for social and affordable housing is over 11 000 properties, the investment that is now on the table is not going to go close to meeting that demand, particularly if we take into account the track record of this Government in building homes.

Most people would be very surprised to know that under this Government the total social housing stock has actually gone backwards. Despite what is talked up as record investment in social housing, over the six years of this Government there has been a decline of around 600 homes. Under the previous Labor government there were more than 2200 built, yet in the first six years -

Ms O'CONNOR - Point of order, Madam Speaker. Members in this place really should tell the truth. Twice here today we have had Labor members falsely claim that the government in place between 2010-14 was a Labor government. It was not a Labor government, it was a Labor-Greens government. There were two Greens ministers in Cabinet. It is important that the history on this is correct. In fact it was a Greens housing minister who delivered 2200 new homes.

Madam SPEAKER - Yes, thank you.

Ms STANDEN - I will continue because my time is being eroded. In the past six years this Liberal Government has built just 585 new social housing homes, just 25 per cent of its promised 2400. I hope that the 1000 new social housing dwellings announced today are homes and not lots and homes, because we have been bogged down in that debate before. I am disappointed that there does not appear to be a maintenance component there and I expected that that would be the case. We know that there is something like a \$50 million liability in housing maintenance and a significant issue to address there.

I hope there is a significant component for disability housing because at the moment I understand that there are targets for 20 per cent of new social housing homes to be disability accessible but those targets are not being met. We know that a third of people on the public housing wait list identify as having a disability, so that is a significant issue.

There is also nothing in this package for young people. One in four of our homeless population are young people. They are couch surfing and a large proportion of that cohort have lost their jobs.

There is nothing in here for skills and training for the building and construction industry and we know that there were already shortages in that regard going into this pandemic, so in the very short term there is going to be a significantly overstretched building and construction sector.

Let us not kid ourselves that there needs to be more in the homelessness space and particularly for regional Tasmanians, for women, migrants, and those escaping domestic violence. I would have liked to have seen something more in supported accommodation. We know, for example, that there is a significant demand for young Tasmanians and also for men. There has been a call for a new shelter for men in the north-west of this state for a long time and this would have been a ripe opportunity to address that.

We know that this Government has announced a rent relief measure but it is only one month's rent relief and it does put the onus on tenants to be able to negotiate a decrease with the landlord. We saw today that there are some significant gaps in that measure. The ban on evictions and rent increases are a good thing but they are only until 30 June and the sector has raised with me significant concerns about the potential of a significant cliff at the end of September when JobKeeper payments are cut out. If we had that double whammy of people losing their income support and the additional protections in the residential market then that could be a very serious situation for the homeless and people struggling with rental affordability.

I would like to see a comprehensive plan addressing the 61 recommendations in the housing affordability select committee report, ones that look at not just social housing as investment, although that is important. One thousand new homes over a couple of years will be a very ambitious target for this Government that does not have a strong track record in that regard. If they are met that is good, but let us not kid ourselves that that will be enough. There needs to be more in private rental reform. I would like to see some measures around the Residential Tenancy Act and addressing some concerns there.

Rental affordability in the private market will continue to be a problem in this state and we need to see some appetite to tackle short-stay accommodation and what the future is there. There has been one release of data but the second lot of data is overdue. There needs to be a considered policy response to that because we have seen with the short-stay and visitor accommodation market drying up over the last couple of months some homes coming into the private rental market, but by and large they are smaller dwellings, they are fully furnished and they are at the higher end of the

market so doing nothing for those lower income households that probably most need it and are struggling with rental affordability, particularly in the state's capital.

The situation with rental affordability is truly a statewide issue. There really has been nothing from this Government that has tried to tackle rental affordability and homelessness in regional Tasmania whatsoever. The focus has been on shelters and on supported accommodation in the south of the state where, granted, the issue is felt most acutely. However, there needs to be a much more comprehensive long-term plan. We need a 20-year plan to tackle housing affordability and housing availability in this state. We need to recognise the existing Affordable Housing Strategy and its underpinning action plans are outdated. We need to wipe that slate clear, rejoice in the additional funding from the Commonwealth from the debt waiver and start afresh with a new plan with new targets and absolute accountability.

John Leedham - Tribute

[2.10 p.m.]

Ms HADDAD (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I rise today to make some comments and mark the passing of John Leedham, a legendary Tasmanian footballer who passed away late last month at the age of 92. John Leedham played for many clubs throughout his playing career finishing up at the North Hobart Football Club where I am a member. To mark his death and honour his life, I wanted to read out a reflection that was written by the current club president of North Hobart Football Club, Craig Martin.

On John Leedham's passing Craig had the following words to say:

Tasmanian football has lost one of its greatest in John Leedham who passed away recently. Many believe him to be the greatest Tasmanian player not to have played in the VFL/AFL and that was demonstrated when he was vice captain to Darrel Baldock in Tasmania's Team of the Century announced in 2004.

John was revered, loved and respected by everyone who knew him. An extraordinarily-gifted left footer, in his playing days he was one of the finest players in the country and unbeatable. He made a habit of regularly beating high profile interstate players in state games. The late Jim Manson, former Glenorchy ruckman and footy commentator, recalled watching John take apart two of Victoria's top players in Bill Twomey and John Brady at North Hobart in 1957. Incredibly he did not play competition football at school yet within a couple of years of joining North Launceston he was in the Tasmanian team.

Born in Campbell Town in 1928, John was an only child and lived on a farm 20 kilometres west of Campbell Town. Life was tough and he was not exposed to a sport at a young age. The Army arrived and set up a depot at Ross in 1944 and footy became much more prominent in the district.

He started playing with Campbell Town in 1944 and his freakish skills were soon under notice and at 16 he started playing with North Launceston. He would rise early every Saturday morning to catch the bus to Launceston to play and return the following morning. John quickly became a valuable player with the most successful North Launceston team ever and one of the greatest teams Tasmania

has ever seen. They won five consecutive premierships from 1946 to 1950 and won the state premiership in 1947, 1949 and 1950.

At just 19 John was selected to play for Tasmania at the 1947 National Carnival at North Hobart. Tasmania won the second division title that year, winning all its games.

After the carnival, he was recruited by Melbourne in 1948. John played well in the pre-season practice games and was a certainty to be picked in the side for the first game of the season at centre half back. Unfortunately, he hurt the cartilage in his knee at training and decided to return home to Tasmania to have it operated on. John said he never regretted returning home because that is where his friends and family were.

After a stint running a pub in the country and marrying the great love of his life, Evelyn 'Bubbles' Bingham, in 1951, John returned to the big time as captain-coach of North Launceston in 1953. The team finished third that year.

John distinguished himself by starring for Tasmania at the national carnival in Adelaide, becoming the first Tasmanian to win all-Australian selection in the first ever all-Australian team. John was also runner-up in the Tasmania medal for the best player at the carnival. After 124 games with North Launceston he crossed to North Hobart in 1954 there playing 114 games and captained and coached the club from 1954 to 1959. Beaten by New Town by five points in the 1956 grand final, North Hobart wanted and got revenge in 1957 beating the then newly-badged Glenorchy team in the grand final. It was a cracking game and the crowd was over 16 000. They got more than their money's worth. The lead changed multiple times all day with North running out winners by 12 points.

The match was a personal triumph for John and an iconic photo of him being chaired off the grounds shows how much the flag meant to the North Hobart supporters. In the 1958 National Carnival John captained and coached Tasmania in division one against the best footballers in Australia. The team emerged as the greatest-ever Tasmania representative side, beating Western Australia and South Australia.

When the team arrived home thousands of Tasmanians turned out at the airport to greet their heroes. This really was a pinnacle in the golden era of Tasmanian football.

Craig goes on to reflect that for those who never saw him play he was a left footer with beautiful hands. He never fumbled and he had an uncanny ability to find the ball in heavy traffic. He had incredible evasion skills and was impossible to lay a glove on but he was also a showman. He believed that if people came to the footy they deserved to be entertained.

John was a larger than life figure who was always warm and engaging. You were also never left in any doubt about what he thought of the opposition or the umpires when he was watching a game. He was a lovable larrikin who loved his family, his footy and his friends. Craig Martin, the current North Hobart Football Club president, was fortunate enough to be coached by John at Rose Bay High School in 1970s. He says it was a wonderful experience. Craig says he coached that

team to a flag in 1978 - that was for the under-15s at Rose Bay High School - and says it was an honour to know him since then.

In 2004 John was selected as ruck rover and vice-captain in the official Tasmanian Team of the Century and then in 2005 was inaugural inductee as a legend in the AFL team Hall of Fame. John was elevated to AFL Tasmania icon status in 2014 and in that year was also inducted into the Tasmanian Sporting Hall of Fame. He was ruck rover and co-vice-captain of the North Hobart Team of the Century. His contribution to North Hobart did not end once his playing career was over. John served as club president with great distinction from 1998 to 2009. He was a life member of the club and a member of the club's Hall of Fame.

Tasmania has indeed lost an absolute legend and we are all the sadder for it. Those who knew him will remember him with great warmth and reverence. John lost his beloved Evelyn 'Bubbles' in 2007 and the club's deepest sympathy and those of the parliament, I am sure, will go to his children, Jennifer, John and Philippa. North Hobart is going to honour him further by naming the new coaches' and media box at the North Hobart oval, which was just unveiled recently, in honour of John and another North Hobart legend, John Devine. It will be known as the Leedham and Devine Centre.

I am told that a private funeral was held this morning just for family. That was necessary under COVID-19 restrictions but once it is appropriate to do so, after the restrictions are lifted, North Hobart will hold a public memorial at the oval. My commiserations to his family and recognition of a wonderful life and dedication to Tasmanian football.

Community Consultation Processes

[2.48 p.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, today, I want to talk about a disturbing trend that this Government has displayed over the past six years about their disdain for community consultation processes, which has ramped up to a whole new level in the COVID-19 period. We are seeing now a complete, total disdain by the Government for the views of the community, for proper democratic processes in terms of the type of consultation methods that are used and respect for people in the opportunities to engage in different ways. Fundamentally, it is instructive about the way this Government approaches doing business which is 'it is our way or the highway'.

There is an assumption that the Government's way is the right way and they really do not want the community's views on any matters, especially on anything controversial. Essentially, they would happily provide a consultation process as long as it presents the final draft bill, or the final plan for a subdivision, or the final plan for a master plan, or management for a world heritage area, simply to have people tick the box, and say, we would prefer the font to be a bit larger. We would like it to be pink on the cover instead of purple. That is essentially all they are interested in hearing.

All the work that people put into long and serious and passionate submissions on draft legislation may as well be wasted. It is wasted because it has no effect on the outcome. We are seeing this time and again.

The most outrageous example is the major projects legislation. The Government, the minister, pushed through that consultation process, about a bill 206 pages long that had no clause notes, no accompanying fact sheets, no accompanying information at all, during the coronavirus pandemic,

at the height of the period where people were adjusting to the restrictions. They extended it but was a pathetically short time period in the first place. They extended it from one month to two months. That is nonsense. This is the most controversial piece of planning legislation to come into this House. It seeks to unstitch everything that holds us together as a community, to be able to have conversations about the changes proposed with a development - changes to landscape, changes to liveability, amenity, changes to property prices, changes to ownership of land. Many people and many groups criticise what we have at the moment but the major projects legislation will unstitch all the normal approval processes. It will stick in place a hand-picked panel that decides on the criteria for assessing the project and constrain other state acts to fit within that criteria. Their final decision cannot be appealed.

For that consultation process to be pushed through in the coronavirus period shows the level of disdain the Government has. It added insult to injury by adding misleading and inaccurate information that the Government called facts on its planning website. They were not facts; they were lies. The information put on the website was a lie. It was designed to confuse people about the truth of what the major projects legislation will do. The community is not stupid. The community knows the way this Government operates.

The minister gave a guarantee during the debate on the Huntingfield supply order that the Huntingfield master plan was where residents could flag their suggestions and concerns about the development. He committed to holding community workshops as part of the consultation process. What has he done? He has put up an interactive web-based tool and a fact sheet. That is no way to consult with residents about this huge subdivision with important issues regarding traffic management, storm water, business districts, liveability and density.

I wrote to him on behalf of the Greens last week asking for a simple two-week increase and a commitment to providing the workshops. There is no reason not to do that now. There is no reason under the social restrictions that will be in place on 13 June for the minister not to do that. I have not had a response. He is just not interested. They do not want to hear people's views. The community will keep giving its views to the Government. This causes a more a divisive way for the community to take up issues.

Regarding the Bruny Island SeaLink ferry, not only did the Government give this contract to an international company, which is fine, they did not see fit to put anything in the contract that requires SeaLink to consult with the island's residents when they make dramatic changes to the ferry timetable. Residents need to know when things are happening. It has to be consistent. SeaLink decided it was not going to get enough profit during the coronavirus period and without consultation introduced another ferry schedule which was nothing like the winter timetable people expected. Minister, not interested. This stuff should be written into the contract.

National Volunteer Week

[2.55 p.m.]

Mr SHELTON (Lyons - Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Management) - Madam Speaker, I wish to take a few minutes to remind the Chamber that a couple of weeks ago it was National Volunteer Week. It was a fantastic effort. Everybody in this Chamber has volunteered at some point in time, whether it is cooking a barbecue for your local footy or soccer club or whatever. However, there are exceptional people out there who spend hundreds of hours of their own time

supporting their local communities. In National Volunteer Week they were recognised for the fantastic efforts that they do.

In the middle of National Volunteer Week it was WOW - Wear Orange Wednesday - for the SES workers. I put a shout out to all the 600 volunteers in SES across Tasmania who do a fantastic job. Through the coronavirus they are out with Tasmania Fire Service volunteers doing the compliance checks assisting the police. There have been more than 4500 compliance checks and the volunteers have been assisting with that. I saw them organising a staging post one morning at Mornington.

On WOW I managed to get an orange shirt and an orange tie and do the right thing by the SES workers. They get out in their orange overalls. Whenever there are issues, whether it be through the coronavirus or with winter coming up, they will be out there in the middle of the night with a tree through the roof of a house or rescuing people from a flood. I wanted to acknowledge the fantastic work that they have been doing, have always done and will always do. That is the volunteering spirit in Tasmania. The checks are ongoing with people still in isolation.

We all very much appreciate what they do, whether it is attending road accidents, supporting councils, at a flood or whatever emergency, they are there.

Neighbourhood Houses and Community House Networks

[2.58 p.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I rise to acknowledge and show my respects to the role Neighbourhood Houses and Community House networks play across Tasmania. All members are in touch with their Neighbourhood Houses and appreciate the amount of work they do to support their local communities. They run programs and connect people in a way that is unique, valuable and authentic.

During the COVID-19 restrictions the normal activities of a house could no longer occur. The houses across the state had to come up with different ways to support their communities, keep people fed, keep people happy, keep people supported, look after their mental health, look after their physical health and make sure they continue to play the role that they play in our community.

In the seat of Franklin, we are very fortunate to have a number of Neighbourhood Houses at Risdon Vale, Warrane, Mornington, Clarendon Vale, Rokeby, Kingston, West Winds at Woodbridge and GeCo down at Geeveston: a number of fantastic houses and communities as well. They have come together in support. During COVID-19 a lot of restrictions were placed on them and I was fortunate enough to be able to support all of the houses in different ways in terms of the work they do, either in moral support, some financial support or in volunteering where I was able to do so safely. I know a couple of houses in Rokeby, Risdon Vale and Kingston were providing support and food deliveries for people. I know Geeveston did as well. As soon as you start identifying houses you are going to miss people out.

They did a magnificent job but in particular there was one house that I was able to help out on four or five Tuesday nights during April and May and that was the Clarendon Vale Neighbourhood House. They had a Tuesday night called Soul Food where they would bring the community together for a great meal and people could come together, enjoy each other's company and have a really good feed once a week. It really has been a focus of that community for a number of years now but

obviously with the COVID-19 restrictions they could not bring people together, so what did they do? Did they pack up their tent and say, 'Oh well, we'll just have to wait until the restrictions are lifted'? No, in classic Neighbourhood House style they said, 'How can we support our community?', and what started as a number of volunteers coming together and cooking meals - I think the first night was 100 meal orders - they have over the last three or four weeks been providing meals for 300 houses across the Clarence Plains region.

As soon as you start listing people you get in trouble but I want to mention Kristy, Ange, Michelle, Nick, Gary, Mel, Vonnice - hello Vonnice, if you are watching - Martin and Ian and the range of fantastic volunteers all coming together every Tuesday. Well, they start cooking on Monday night and then all of Tuesday and I have been able to spend a couple of hours serving that food and helping people out. They really have done an amazing job and I know Rokeby has done some fantastic work as well.

To all the Neighbourhood Houses across the state I am sure all of us in this House today give our eternal thanks for the support you give to communities. The kind of community you build is very important in modern Tasmania today. I acknowledge all the volunteers and people who work in Neighbourhood Houses across the state but particularly those in my great seat of Franklin for the work they do. I wanted to thank them and put that on the record.

The House adjourned at 3.02 p.m.