

THURSDAY 7 MAY 2020

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

QUESTIONS

COVID -19 - Launceston General Hospital

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.02 a.m.]

The Launceston General Hospital has worked under increased pressure in recent weeks as it has supported not just the north during the impact of COVID-19 but also the north-west community and their health needs as a consequence of the closure of the North West Regional Hospital. Staff at the LGH have done an incredible job and have our sincere appreciation and thanks.

Yesterday, you told the House the majority of recommendations from the interim report into the north-west outbreak had been implemented, but concerningly there was no clear time frame for the commencement of some of them. The approach to training in the use of PPE is piecemeal across the state's hospital network. Are you aware that while PPE training has been offered at the North West Regional Hospital and the Royal Hobart Hospital, the LGH has not had access to the same programs? This is of great concern given the outbreak previously experienced at the North West Regional Hospital and the fact the LGH has been treating a number of COVID positive patients with a staff member now also testing positive.

Will you act urgently to ensure all workers in all hospitals are supported with the same training in the use of PPE that is required to keep them and their patients safe?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Ms White, for that question and her interest in this matter. Like her, I also place on the record very firmly our appreciation for the efforts of our health workers across the state, but also all those people who work within the public sector and, importantly, all those working in the private sector going to work under what are extraordinarily difficult and challenging circumstances. They should all share in the appreciation of the House.

Regarding the interim report into the north-west, as I indicated yesterday, the majority of the recommendations are being implemented. Those that are more complex are being planned so they can be implemented. As I understand it all of them are under way in one shape or another.

I have not heard that concern about the LGH and will certainly seek some further advice. My understanding is the THS is planning a roll-out to all staff across the networks. It is a wide network, if I can call it that, and this will be communicated with all staff. If it has not been already it will be communicated soon. I will look into the matter at the LGH and get further advice.

Regarding all of our hospitals and our healthcare workers, in the different settings they operate in, they have my very deep gratitude and the gratitude of this Government and, I am certain, the gratitude of this House. They operate under difficult circumstances. In many cases they are expert

in their fields, but importantly, hospitals take a whole range of skills in order to work. For those who work in cleaning, and those who are orderlies, those who are at the front edge of medicine, they should all be recognised, because they are all doing a fantastic job under extraordinary, difficult and challenging circumstances.

COVID-19 - Random Testing

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.05 a.m.]

An article just published in *The Medical Journal of Australia* backs Labor's call for COVID-19 testing to be expanded beyond those showing symptoms. This paper finds, and I quote:

Asymptomatic transmission remains a constant threat to the elderly population and has implications for infection control measures; community surveillance must go beyond targeting only symptomatic individuals.

In your press conference this morning, it was disclosed that just 382 people have been tested in the past 24 hours. This is well below your stated target of 2000 tests a day. Yesterday, you were dismissive of Labor's calls for random testing at places like supermarkets and shopping centres where large numbers of people are gathering, instead expecting people to present to testing centres, which your data shows they clearly are not doing in large enough numbers.

Random testing has been adopted in many places around the world, and the Australian Capital Territory has also begun testing asymptomatic people who present at testing centres. In light of the latest evidence in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, and given that the demographic of the Tasmanian population places many at high risk due to age, will you immediately move to introduce more random testing in line with the recommendation to go beyond targeting asymptomatic people?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that question. From the advice I have as of yesterday, I understand that we tested 482 people - I am not sure where you got your 300 number from - so nearly 500 people tested yesterday. As we have continually said, we would like to see more people coming forward. Every morning we message that fact across this state. If you have the slightest symptom, you should contact your GP or the public health hotline and you should get yourself tested.

The advice I have been taking, along with this Government and the Minister for Health, has been from our public health experts. I have not read the article you pointed to, but I clearly place on the record that Dr Mark Veitch and Dr Scott McKeown have been outstanding in their advice and their work ethic. I have watched the two of them work themselves into the ground to provide the level of advice and support that our health services wanted, but also importantly the support that we have needed as a Government to make informed decisions. They should be commended for the work they have done.

Regarding testing, as I said yesterday we have relied on the advice of both the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and our public health experts, and we will continue to do so. Should

that advice evolve, then obviously we will consider that advice and take on board their recommendations. At this point, that is not what we are being recommended to do.

I encourage Tasmanians, should they have the slightest sniffle or concern about any respiratory matter, to contact the public health line, to contact their GP, to book in for a test and get tested.

COVID-19 - Major Projects Legislation

Ms O'CONNOR question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.09 a.m.]

We have all been working together to apply one key principle to Tasmania's pandemic response: people first, no-one left behind. The Greens believe the same should be applied to this island's social and economic recovery. Regrettably, your Government is trying to make divisive and flawed major projects legislation the centrepiece of Tasmania's recovery. Surely, you recognise this is not going to do the trick. Your decision, announced today, not to flog the Treasury building is now a sign that major private investment is some way off.

There is an alternative. The construction industry is worried about their work drying up within six months. Tasmania desperately needs more affordable housing. Your Government could ramp up the construction of this critical social infrastructure and, at the same time, help to drive this island's recovery. Do you agree that a successful rebuild will be one that prioritises people and planet over corporate profiteering? Will you commit to strong investment in social housing to help guarantee more Tasmanians can access a secure and affordable home?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Greens, Ms O'Connor, member for Clark, for that question, and her enduring interest in the matter of the Major Projects legislation, which will be an enduring disagreement between herself and myself in terms of the need for that framework legislation.

We have extended the period for public consultation on this legislation, taking into account that we have a pandemic under way. The need for legislation to deal with complex projects remains, either outside the scope of a local government's capacity or may require complex decisions to be made, and it is best to have a panel put in place -

Ms O'Connor - That is what the Planning Commission is for. They set up assessment panels. They already do that.

Madam SPEAKER - Order, Ms O'Connor.

Mr GUTWEIN - It is best to put an assessment panel in place for these projects. In terms of the ultimate decision for our Major Projects legislation, that is not a matter for government. That would be made by an independent panel at arm's length from the Government.

Setting that aside, one thing I strongly believe is this: we need to ensure that, as we step our way through this, we never lose sight of the need for kindness, gratitude and respect. That will be really important as we move into the next phase of the recovery from the challenges we have had

in recent times. For Tasmanians who, in some cases, will be feeling frustrated that their business has been taken away from them, or they cannot enjoy some of the activities they had in the past, we will always - for the period that the pandemic and before there is a vaccine, which hopefully will arrive - have to endure some form of social distancing. That will be frustrating for many Tasmanians. I can understand that. I say to people, please act with kindness, please act with gratitude and please show respect. As a community, it will be important that we continue to do that. That goes to the heart of what is Tasmania.

You asked about other infrastructure that may be considered as we work through this. I have established the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council. Matters such as infrastructure, whether it be housing, working on our schools or looking at key transport routes, will be looked at. We have a budget with a wealth of projects across it. We will be looking to ensure we can deliver where there is the greatest need and where we can get people back to work.

One of the key things that is exercising my mind as we move our way through this is to ensure that those people who were connected with the jobs market in some way, only a short handful of weeks ago, are those that we can, if necessary, help to retrain and reskill, help to get into those industries that are going to endure and continue through this pandemic. For some industries it will be a slow step back. For others, such as in the construction trades, and I am glad you are supporting the construction sector -

Ms O'Connor - I always have.

Mr GUTWEIN - and I am not making a point that you have not. We disagree sometimes about what we might build. Having people swinging hammers and using power saws, we can both agree would be a good outcome if we could have more Tasmanians employed.

Construction will play a key part in how we step through this and how we rebuild a stronger Tasmania as a result. We will be looking at all the opportunities we have across our Tasmanian community in looking at the projects that we might bring forward.

Glenorchy Jobs Hub

Ms OGILVIE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.15 a.m.]

Planning for economic recovery is essential and we need to support Tasmanians to rebound as effectively as possible. Securing jobs is more important than ever and I am thinking about our young people. In your State of the State speech on 3 March 2020 you announced the establishment of our Glenorchy jobs hub as a new project, with \$1.3 million-worth of funding over two years, after the request of me and others to set one up. I am keen to make sure that we are still on track. The success of the jobs hubs around Tasmania, in the Sorell, Break O'Day, the West Coast, George Town and Derwent Valley shires, shows it is a good model and does deliver results. What is the time frame for the Glenorchy jobs hub to be launched, as I truly hope the pandemic has given us reason to accelerate setting this up?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Clark for that question. We are absolutely committed to the Glenorchy jobs hub. I mentioned in this House earlier this year that I had the opportunity to

visit the hub at Sorell, to meet with those at the training centre and the Mayor of Sorell, Kerry Vincent. That is a project that has worked in spades. It has engaged a range of people looking for work and opportunities and was also very well supported by the community. The same model can work very well in Glenorchy, as I have previously outlined.

For obvious reasons, over the last five weeks there has been a pause in some government activity as we have focused on the health crisis. That health crisis is not over but we need to deal with the economic crisis as well.

In terms of Glenorchy, we will be re-engaging at early opportunity to progress that. Under the terms of what was announced, we would look to employ a Glenorchy workforce development coordinator, we will establish the employment hub, there will be a training fund to support the work of the above, and we will be looking at developing and implementing a transport program to assist people to get to work.

That is front and centre in our thinking, but I stress to this House and to Tasmanians that we are not through this yet. We cannot become complacent. It is important that we focus on where we can safely reopen our economy. It needs it to be done safely and we have to continue to have an eye, first and foremost, to the health of Tasmanians and for those who are most vulnerable in our community, especially ageing Tasmanians. We simply cannot take our eye off that.

In terms of your question, it is something that I feel very strongly about. It is a great project, it has worked very well in other locations and we will roll it out as soon as practicable.

COVID-19 - Social and Economic Support Measures

Mrs PETRUSMA question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.19 a.m.]

The coronavirus has had a significant impact on families, businesses and local communities across my electorate of Franklin. Can you please update the House on progress of the roll-out of the Government's social and economic support measures and how they are assisting Tasmanians during this COVID-19 pandemic?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Mrs Petrusma, member for Franklin, for that question and her interest in this matter. I want to thank the House for their support as we have rolled out a range of measures. We have announced in past weeks significant support to Tasmanians; now, in total more than \$1 billion. In fact, by announcement we have added, and I think everyone is aware as I touched on this last week, an additional \$3 million to support temporary visa holders; \$4.1 million in additional funding to support those looking for housing support, especially our homeless; and an additional \$20 million placed into the two very successful and initially oversubscribed support packages for small business in both the \$2500 emergency grant and also the up to \$15 000 grant. The total measures included in our package are now slightly over \$1 billion.

The packages contained initiatives to support our health, community, business, jobs, households and individuals. The Government continues to roll out those packages. To date there has been around \$200 million worth of support provided. I will caveat that by saying included, in

this there has been a very strong appetite from local government for bringing forward projects. At this stage of the \$150 million loan fund there has been a request for \$111 million worth of support of the interest-free loans to bring projects forward. You might recall I said I wanted those projects to be screwdriver and paintbrush ready, small projects in communities to get people into work.

On top of that the Government made the obvious commitment to remove the efficiency dividends from the public sector to provide certainty into the future, and a further \$258 million in efficiency dividends has been removed.

Next week, regarding support, I will be delivering and handing down both an economic and fiscal update. It is being finalised now with the end of the month of April. It will provide an update on the budget on what has been spent this year and what we expect to spend next year. It will also have the March quarterly report included, which is required by the 15th. We will release it by Friday next week. It will make sober reading. I am looking at the shadow treasurer here because I think he understands the challenges we face. I make the point today that my expectation is we will have a deficit this year of more than half a billion dollars. Our revenues from GST and payroll tax have all been massively affected. It is going to be a difficult period as we work through this, but notwithstanding that, my confidence in the Tasmanian community, the Tasmania economy and Tasmanian brand as we rebuild, we will rebuild the state's finances moving forward.

I will run through some of the support we have provided. At the end of question time I will table a report which will provide an update on all of the different measures as we have worked our way through. To date:

To householders in the community, there have been 11 500 social housing households provided with rent relief at a cost of \$6.7 million.

There have been 267 Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants totalling almost \$109 000 paid to people who have been required to self isolate.

Six hundred and fifty-two Pandemic Isolation Assistance Grants have been paid to temporary visa holders. More than \$221 000 has been paid out to temporary visa holders since we made that announcement.

School levy refunds of more than \$5.5 million have been paid back into parent's bank accounts. There are some further refunds to be made before the end of May.

I am also pleased to announce work is progressing on the additional funding we provided to family violence services. Funding of \$310 000 has been provided to a number of community based specialist family violence support services already.

From July, approximately 260 000 Tasmanian customers will benefit from the price freezes coming on their water bill and price caps on their electricity bills.

In terms of small business, the Government has put in place measures for electricity companies to waive the payment of the first quarterly bill for small businesses on or after 1 April 2020, so as those bills are coming through for the previous three months, those bills are being waived. TasWater is also waiving the quarterly bill for the last quarter, and that will be most welcome by small

business. The combined costs of the electricity waiver and TasWater's waiver will be about \$50 million; it is significant.

Payroll tax relief of \$5.4 million has been provided to 29 Tasmanian hospitality, tourism and seafood employers that operate in that sector. Payroll tax relief totalling \$6.1 million in refunds is also being provided to over 160 employers who had wages of up to \$5 million.

Also 10 355 emergency grants of \$2500 each, totalling almost \$25.9 million, have been provided to support small businesses at this point, and there are more to be paid as I understand it.

As well, 323 small business hardship grants of \$15 000 each, totalling, at this stage, \$4.845 million have also been paid.

The Government's \$50 million no-interest small business loan scheme has received 300 applications, with 108 loans already approved, for more than \$11.6 million. As at 30 April, 263 applications have been received from GPs, pharmacies and dentists, totalling \$2.4 million, and \$2.47 million has been approved under the Government's \$5 million primary healthcare grants program to assist those healthcare professionals as well.

A significant amount of support has been provided across the community to businesses, individuals, households and the broader community. It has come at a cost, and we are going to need to work very hard over time to ensure that we can rebuild our economy, rebuild our revenues and, importantly, get people back to work.

I clearly make the point that we need to step back into this cautiously. We do not want to get caught with a second wave. We need to be cautious, sensible and responsible. Importantly, we need to acknowledge that for many Tasmanians, a level of frustration will be starting to be felt. We need to take them with us, because in coming months, the worst place we could be in is having a 'sore tooth' outcome of the measures that we have put in place. For a small business to recapitalise at some stage, and then have to close again as restrictions are placed on them, would likely finish them.

We need to be cautious, we need to be sensible, and we need to step into this in a staged way.

COVID -19 - Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council - Membership

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.28 a.m.]

Last week I wrote to you asking you to include a voice for working Tasmanians on your recently established Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council chaired by Don Challen.

Workers across our state have performed fundamental and critically important jobs throughout this period, from supermarket employees to cleaners to health professionals, and they deserve to be represented in decision-making. It is also important to hear the voice of workers across a range of

industries that will play a critical role in our recovery. It is essential to ensure that workers feel safe to return to their jobs.

Expanding the membership to allow for a representative from the union movement on the council will be incredibly important to fully understand how the economic and social recovery can be best achieved. Will you include a representative from the union movement on the council to ensure that working people are given a voice at the table?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. You would not be surprised that there have been calls from a range of sectors to be included on that council.

We looked to ensure that we selected, in the main, individuals - and Leanne McLean is slightly different in that she holds a statutory position, but hers is an important appointment to that council on the basis of her very strong links with youth and young people, and they need to be represented. She also brings a range of other skills.

Regarding the other stakeholder groups and unions, I have a regular hook-up with Unions Tasmania and Jessica Munday, and she has been very good to work with. Unfortunately I had another carry-over appointment this week and I could not have my phone hook-up with her this week.

One point I make to any group that is looking to engage with that council is that they can.

The Local Government Association of Tasmania has been in touch, and they would like to have a representative on there, on the basis that their councils will play a role. That is a fair point, but they have the same opportunity, as do the unions, along with local government or any other significant stakeholder groups, to actually feed into that council and provide their advice, and their view of things that need to be taken into account

Under the leadership of Don Challen, that council will then, at the end of June, provide recommendations to Government in terms of early initiatives, followed by an interim report that can be utilised to frame the budget later this year, and then a final report early next year.

While I can understand the desire of individuals or groups that would like to be a part of that council, nobody is fettered in terms of their opportunity to feed into that council and to have their voice heard.

COVID-19 - Home Energy Bills - Assistance

Mr O'BYRNE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.32 a.m.]

We have all been asking Tasmanians to stay home to save lives. Sadly, 20 000 people have lost their jobs. Many who can are working from home. Kids are being schooled at home, and others are self-isolating.

Against this backdrop, power bills have begun arriving in letterboxes and are causing unwelcome stress. This increase in energy usage by people spending time at home has been compounded by a cold start to winter. It has resulted in a bill shock at a time when people can least afford it. Capping household power prices will not be enough to soften the blow of higher power bills.

On the eve of the 2018 election campaign, your Government spent \$10 million on the special energy bonus delivered in the middle of summer. Will you follow this precedent and provide a winter energy supplement to households in financial stress at a time when they really need the support?

Ms O'Connor - It is not close enough to an election, Mr O'Byrne.

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I heard that and it was very unkind.

Ms O'Connor - The last cheques that went out were on the eve of the state election.

Mr GUTWEIN - That was very unkind.

Madam SPEAKER - I think we have enough cynicism.

Ms O'Connor - I am not a goldfish. I remember.

Mr GUTWEIN - I hoped that some kindness, gratitude and respect would be shown in this Chamber.

I thank the shadow treasurer for his question, the nub of which is largely: is the Government prepared to provide further support if it is necessary? The simple answer, as we work our way through this, is that we obviously are. Whether that takes the form of assistance in terms of a power bill, or whether it is assistance in other areas, we will always keep an open mind to where pressure points may emerge throughout this process.

For those people who have lost their jobs, and those who are on JobKeeper - and as we start to get a better handle on it, I think the number of displaced workers is significantly more than 20 000. The coming data releases over the next couple of months will paint, I think, a very stark picture of the impact this has had, both on our unemployment rate, and those who are now on JobSeeker, but also on JobKeeper payments. At this stage I understand about 11 000 Tasmanian businesses have signed up for that, so we know there will be significantly more people on JobKeeper.

Regarding the support the Government has provided to date - and I thank the Cabinet and this House for their support in rolling out what has been recognised around the country has been one of the most comprehensive support packages in terms of community, individuals and businesses.

On this side of the House, we will keep an open mind where those pressure points may emerge. We have demonstrated this with our very swift response. Out of step with the federal government, and most states, whilst making a modest contribution, at least a contribution in terms of temporary visa holders. Making a further investment ensuring those who are homeless and needing housing relief have additional support.

As we work our way through this, as matters come forward, we will consider them on their merits and if necessary, as a Government, we will be prepared to respond. I make this point: we will be facing more than half a billion dollars' worth of deficit this coming year. The impact of GST, which is still being understood by the Federal Treasury, and the impact over this last quarter on consumer sentiment and their purchasing power, has obviously been significantly reduced. We need to be cognisant of where needs arise. We also need to be cognisant of the impact that is going to have on the state's ability to respond. But as I have said, where pressure points come to the fore, if we need to respond, then we will look to respond as best we can, noting the challenging circumstances we are in.

COVID-19 - Concerns of North-West Doctors

Dr WOODRUFF question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.37 a.m.]

North-west doctors have been at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been risking their personal safety, working day after day, caring for sick patients. They understand what it takes to keep a person healthy and well, and they desperately care about how you step their community out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Twenty-three north-west doctors have written to you, expressing their deep concern about their community's long-term health and your plan to commence logging of old growth and native forest in takayna/Takine.

Our recovery from COVID-19 should prioritise building a society that can flourish into the future, not accelerate us towards further upheaval. It must rebuild our state and that must mean tackling the climate emergency. As climate heating builds, lives are put at risk and significant physical and mental health problems are caused. The permanent loss of livelihood, in many regional communities, is on the line.

These north-west doctors have called on you to show political will and look to the future for the health of their community. Will you listen to these doctors and lead a recovery that puts climate mitigation and the health of communities first?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Franklin, Dr Woodruff, for that question. I was looking a bit bemused because I have received and read the letter that came in.

What I want to put first, certainly from this side of the House, and I think also from the other side of the House, our first and foremost thought has to be how do we get those tens of thousands of Tasmanians who were engaged with the job market only a handful of weeks ago, back into some form of meaningful work at the earliest opportunity?

I thank those hardworking north-west doctors for the work they do. In fact, in terms of healthcare workers across the state, they should all be thanked for the work they have done. We will be forever in debt for the efforts of those people in the health sector.

Now is not the time to be pushing an ideological barrow -

Ms O'Connor - Are you saying that to the doctors, or to us?

Madam SPEAKER - Order, please. Kindness, respect, discipline.

Mr GUTWEIN - And gratitude. Discipline was not in it. When I received the letter, I took the view that I will accept it with good grace. I expect we will see more people bringing forward more ideas and solutions, as they see it, over time. Individuals and others, well-meaning from their point of view, will write to government with a range of suggestions. I am certain we will receive many suggestions about what Tasmania, the country and the world could do.

But let us not forget that we have a health crisis. We have tens of thousands of Tasmanians who have been dislocated from their work and that needs to be our focus right now. Right now, I am focused, as is this side of the House, on exactly what is in front of us. We have a health crisis we have to deal with and we also have an economic crisis. We have tens of thousands of Tasmanians out of work and that needs to be our focus.

We are going to work through the process of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council. We will take advice and will announce early initiatives at the end of June, hopefully, so that we can take some immediate steps, if need be, that may help to get some of those people back into work. I caution everyone in this House; whilst we need to have an eye to the horizon, the fight is right here, amongst us right now, and we need to deal with that first and foremost.

COVID-19 - Volunteering Tasmania

Mrs RYLAH question to MINISTER for DISABILITY SERVICES and COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, Mr ROCKLIFF

[10.42 a.m.]

Can you please inform the House as to how the Tasmanian Government's Social and Economic Support Package is helping rally volunteers in our communities as we deal with the ongoing impact of the pandemic?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank Mrs Rylah for her question. The health, safety and wellbeing of Tasmanians is our number one priority as we face the challenges of the coronavirus together. There was a clear need to get in early and support organisations and individuals struggling as a result of the pandemic, to provide economic stimulus to help businesses and Tasmanians affected by the virus.

As the peak body for volunteering, Volunteering Tasmania is taking the lead in supporting local volunteer organisations by helping them find and retain volunteers, making it easier for people interested in volunteering to get involved. As part of our economic support package, the Tasmanian Government provided \$130 000 to Volunteering Tasmania to mobilise volunteers through their emergency volunteers crew. Through this, Tasmania has rallied its very own volunteer army with over 2100 people registered for the emergency volunteers crew. This is a 75 per cent increase on the pre COVID-19 numbers, with a large majority deployed in the north-west during the additional travel restrictions.

Many of the new volunteers who have registered with the EV crew have working with vulnerable people and police checks, which means they can be quickly deployed to where the help is needed. As the response to COVID-19 continues, Tasmanians are being urged to register to volunteer as part of this coordinated response to help deliver a range of essential services in Tasmanian communities.

With many of Tasmanian volunteers over the age of 65 and much more vulnerable to the virus, we need more volunteers to put their hand up to ensure Tasmanians get the help they need during these times. Many younger volunteers are registering to provide their time, which means the next generation of volunteers are now gaining insight into the selfless and rewarding work that volunteering presents. We are committed to helping all Tasmanians get through this time of uncertainty and we will continue to work with our community organisations to ensure we support those in greatest need.

Tasmania has had its share of bushfires, floods and other natural disasters and our volunteers and volunteer organisations are pivotal in responding to these situations, including the current pandemic. Tasmanians can be proud of their strong commitment to volunteering, which is a vital part of Tasmania's social fabric. Without the contributions of our volunteers, many of the events, services and supports Tasmanians access simply would not be able to be accessed and available, which has become very apparent with our current COVID-19 response.

It is in part thanks to these volunteers that nearly 11 000 ready-to-eat meals have been produced for Tasmanians in need since 24 April, which is 330 per cent increase from pre-COVID-19 levels, which is fantastic. I thank the workers and the 200-plus volunteers working together to coordinate the production and delivery of these meals for Tasmanians across the state. This is a wonderful example of community organisations working together to help Tasmanians in need and shows the community spirit is absolutely alive and well.

On behalf of the Tasmanian Government, all of us, I express my attitude for the rapid response and hard work that many community sector organisations and their volunteers have delivered to support our entire community, especially those who would have found this situation far tougher without it.

COVID-19 - Eligibility Criteria For Power Bill Relief

Mr O'BYRNE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.46 a.m.]

Many businesses that have been forced to close continue to have to pay utility bills despite being unable to trade. Power is emerging as a major cost to businesses. While Aurora has announced some hardship assistance, the cut-off point excludes many hospitality businesses that have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 shut down. Businesses like Tall Timbers in Smithton and the Shoreline Hotel in Howrah are not eligible for any ongoing assistance despite trade grinding to a halt. On top of this, transmission and network charges, which make up a large component of energy bills, have not changed. Will you step in to broaden the eligibility criteria for power relief and ensure that small and medium-sized businesses, no matter who their retailer is, are able to get power bill relief through this period?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the shadow treasurer, Mr O'Byrne, for that question. In terms of the support we are providing, I am not sure if you were signalling that those two businesses you named were not eligible for relief on their last bill -

Mr O'Byrne - Not the last bill, ongoing support, so they are still paying. They do not come in to the assistance package because their power usage is under 150 megawatts.

Mr GUTWEIN - How much energy would they be using at the moment? My understanding would be that those businesses would be in hibernation, unfortunately, and that their energy use would be very low at the moment.

Mr O'Byrne - No, my understanding is, and they have informed us, that they have to keep the power on for certain elements of their business. Can you explain the cut-off rate of 150 megawatts?

Mr GUTWEIN - I am happy to seek further advice and look at what the total level of support has been. I know both of those businesses and the operators and they run very good businesses. I would like to get a clearer picture of their current usage. I expect and hope that as we step back into this, as they begin to reopen their businesses, their power use would go up commensurate with their ability to earn revenue. As you have named those businesses, and if it is okay with you, we might make contact to understand the circumstances.

This will be challenging. The Government has made available, through Aurora and TasWater, significant relief to the small business sector in terms of their power bills. I am not certain whether those businesses are larger. I will not rule out providing additional support as matters are brought to our attention, if we can reasonably provide it and it is defensible. I will take further advice and understand from them, as we roll out the staged process in bringing businesses in that sector online, what their revenue-generating opportunity is and what their energy usage might look like.

I make the point: I am certain we will have calls for more government support through this over time. Already, we have provided unprecedented levels. As I said in the previous answer, I am not ruling out looking at hot spots or where matters bubble up and we need to deal with them. To also ensure we are responsible as a Government we need to look at it in the lens of the impact it is now having and will have on the state and our ability to bring the state out of it and the state budget out of it over time as well. Those things need to be balanced.

I take on board the matter you have raised. We will make contact with those businesses and understand the circumstances they operate in, noting they will be able to benefit from some of the federal government's support, both JobKeeper, some of the tax relief and likewise the packages we provided. They will be able to avail themselves of those.

Mr O'Byrne - No, but they were examples illustrative that the cut off level in our view is too low. That is the point of the question.

Mr GUTWEIN - We will have a look at it and engage with those businesses.

COVID-19 - Assistance for Small Businesses

Mrs PETRUSMA question to MINISTER for ENERGY, Mr BARNETT

[10.51 a.m.]

In my electorate of Franklin, small businesses are facing pressures unlike any we have seen in our lifetime. Whether it is butcher's shop in the Huon or a café in Howrah they are doing it tough, just like other communities right across Tasmania and Australia. Can you please outline what packages the Tasmanian Liberal Government has put in place to assist small businesses through this unprecedented pandemic, particularly those that relate to your portfolios of energy, fisheries and primary industries?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question and note her strong support for small business over her career and acknowledge that.

These are unprecedented times and it requires a response which is unprecedented. In that regard the Gutwein Liberal Government is certainly delivering. Small business is the backbone of our economy. It is the life blood of our communities, particularly in those rural and regional areas. We are doing everything we can to support small business to survive and recover. We recognise electricity is a key ingredient to success and survival specifically for residential cost of living, the business cost of doing business. That is why we have delivered the quarterly electricity bill waiver for an estimated 34 000 small businesses and community organisations all across Tasmania. That is the extent of the support.

It is heartening to hear from some of those businesses such as the local community radio station in the Huon, in Jacque Petrusma's electorate of Franklin. They wrote, 'Having this bill waived has been a huge relief and is greatly appreciated'.

Then you add to that, as the Premier has indicated, the quarterly TasWater bill waiver for eligible small businesses and the capping of power and water rates for 12 months from July this year. Every little bit counts and we will consider all the requests that come through, but this is what we have done to date and it is working and appreciated.

The support measures do not end there. We have the Small Business Emergency Support and hardship grants, the Business Continuity Grants and support loan schemes, the payroll tax and land tax relief for eligible businesses, the rural financial counselling services, Rural Alive and Well services for mental health, support for seasonal workers as the Premier said earlier, student and other relevant visa holders, a fishing industry support package of \$5.5 million targeting fees and licence fee relief for our fishery sector, training and skill development schemes such as the \$6.3 million boost for Rapid Response Skills Initiative and the new Train Now Fund.

The package of support has been well received. I was contacted recently by an oyster grower and this is what they said -

Our heartfelt thanks to the Tasmanian Government support through the COVID- 19 event. We received both the small business grant and the hardship grant along with the marine lease fees waived. These supports for small business

are most certainly making a difference to ensuring we have every potential of thriving on the other side of the pandemic.

That is appreciated, Madam Speaker. I note that another oyster farmer in the member for Franklin's electorate, this time on Bruny Island, is also a recipient of the Small Business Emergency Grant, the Small Business Hardship Grant, as well of the waiving of the marine farm licence renewals and the ShellMAP levy. This farmer now has that financial certainty to keep his staff on. It is great to have that feedback because jobs are absolutely critical. That is what we are about.

Our fisheries industry is so important to Tasmania. The Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council has contacted the Government to note they have fielded calls from many of their members, exceptionally grateful for the government support provided to the seafood industry. This is what they wrote in their letter -

The waiving of licence renewals for most seafood operators for a 12-month period (including refunds for those who have already paid) and the Small Business Emergency Support Program will provide much needed cash into the pockets of seafood operators, many of whom have been out of work since the 23rd January.

Helping businesses survive and then rebuild is our top priority. It is of utmost importance to our Government. Small business is critical to leading Tasmania out of the pandemic as we go forward and, of course, our number one priority is keeping Tasmanians safe, healthy and secure from the Coronavirus, but we are planning for recovery. We do have a way forward, to rebuild a stronger Tasmania.

There will be challenges but there will be opportunities and small business will be there at the front line to help Tasmania move through these very challenging circumstances. We are taking these opportunities to turn that around, to provide new jobs, new opportunities for economic development and growth as well as requiring that social support, as the Premier has made clear. We have a strong plan, we have those structures and support in place and we have a plan in place to rebuild an even stronger Tasmania.

COVID-19 - Mental Health Workers in Schools

Ms WHITE question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[10.57 a.m.]

You would be aware that the federal government commissioned the Peter Underwood Centre at the University of Tasmania to prepare a report into learning at home during COVID-19. The report notes that a targeted strategy of physical re-engagement at school is needed to mitigate the negative impacts on learning. Participants in the study recognise two key areas of focus. The first was to diagnose and remediate any learning loss, and the second was to pay due attention to student's health and wellbeing, particularly their mental health during the readjustment phase. In light of this report's recommendations will you adopt Labor's policy to employ mental health workers in every school to make sure we can best support our young people?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question and her interest in this matter. Getting our schools up and going again is going to be a key part of ensuring we can support our broader economy, that we can support parents, and that we do not lose that learning opportunity for our students. The support you have asked for, in a large part, is already there through school nurses and the range of other supports we provide.

We have been consistent in our position on schools. Before Easter, we said that we would reopen our schools when we came back to school after the holidays, that we would encourage parents, where they could, to keep their children at home and learning, supported either online or with school resources. For those parents could not support their children or needed to work, the schools would be open to support them.

In line with that, myself and the Education minister have made the point that we would keep that policy under review as we step through this pandemic. When we finished last term, around 7 per cent of students were attending school before Easter. It has been above 23 per cent now.

As we step our way through this we are going to see an increased desire from both parents and students to engage more fully on campus. It is important to continue to work with our teachers through this to ensure they are well positioned to have a safe work place, but importantly, to provide the learning our students need.

Ms White - And allied health support and mental health support.

Mr GUTWEIN - On the matter you raised, we are encouraging the use by students of the Wellbeing Check-in tool for all students that allows the student's teacher to ask them a series of questions about how they are finding learning at home, how they are feeling and providing real time updates of where our kids are at. That is being put in place. It asks about their mood, their worries and those things concerning them. For many of our kids at the moment across this state mum or dad may have lost their job.

Ms O'Connor - It's awful.

Mr GUTWEIN - Mum or dad may have had their business close - it is awful, thank you Ms O'Connor. There is no other way to describe that. In many families there are increasing levels of stress and concern.

One of the key reasons I have said we will announce a pathway back tomorrow is to ensure we provide some certainty. We will march, though, to the beat of our own drum in Tasmania. We will do that cautiously and always with an eye to the most vulnerable of our community, our aged cohort. We need to do that.

Regarding those students and the concerns you have raised, as I have said we have an opportunity to check in with their teacher and we are providing other supports. Importantly, with our school policy we will continue to keep that under review. We will be mindful both of the mood, attitude and concerns being shared across our parents, teachers and students. I have said this before on many occasions; our schools are the best place for a child to learn with an engaged teacher in front of them in a classroom. If that were not the case then we would have moved to distance education a long time ago.

I have a view that as soon as we can, I would like to see more students coming back to school, but acknowledge the concerns of teachers and pressures parents are under. We need to find a way as we start to step back that we can look at what the options might be to ensure we can have our students more fully engaged at school.

COVID-19 - Social and Affordable Housing Projects

Ms STANDEN question to PREMIER, Mr GUTWEIN

[11.03 a.m.]

There was a crisis in housing availability and affordability going into the coronavirus pandemic with an estimated shortfall of demand for social and affordable housing of at least 11 100 dwellings. Housing advocates and academics like Jacqueline DeVries from the Institute of Social Change at UTAS agree that:

... the current COVID-19 environment could be an opportune time to renew investment in social housing while stimulating the economy, creating jobs in construction and relieving housing related financial stress.

Your Government has a poor track record, though, of delivering new social housing supply. You have promised 2400 new homes over eight years and delivered just 25 per cent of that target at the six-year mark.

In June 2017, the Government announced a new aged care facility for low income Tasmanians with construction expected to start in the 2018-19 financial year. Nearly three years later the need for such a facility has never been higher, but not one brick has been laid.

You Government stalled on its 2015 action plan to develop the Huntingfield estate only to turnaround in early June 2019 to propose a land supply order to rezone the land using its controversial and divisive supposedly fast track legislation to deliver up to 600 new social affordable homes, following a community consultation process and a master plan promised to begin prior to Christmas. Nearly a year later the project seems to have fallen into a black hole.

In the context of the current pandemic, your Government has promised to bring projects to deliver more social and affordable housing.

What are your Government's revised targets, given the need for housing is only going to increase, given 20 000 people have now lost their jobs?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank the member for that question and her interest in this matter. I am not as negative as you in terms of the 20 000 people, or however many, who have lost their jobs. I hope that as a parliament, as a community, we can find a way to step our way into this sensibly and responsibly, without risking health, but at the same time trying to get as many of those jobs back as quickly as we can. We owe it to people to do that.

The question you have asked goes to one I was asked earlier today, in terms what we may do and where we might spend funds moving forward. At the moment, we are looking at the entirety

of the infrastructure program to ensure that where we can bring forward projects, where we have an opportunity to have more people employed, for there to be a strong pipeline, then we will do that. That is important.

I believe the politics in this should be set aside, in terms of whether it be major projects or those long-held divisions that we might have had in this place. We will look to bring forward infrastructure that is going to provide jobs, and provide them quickly, and importantly, employ as many Tasmanians as we possibly can.

I do not agree with your criticism of the steps we have taken with regard to social and affordable housing. If I look back to the amount of funding that was in the budget to build more houses when I first became Treasurer, it is a statement of fact that we are now funding, over four years, roughly four times what was included in the budget that I inherited. We have a range of mechanisms, we have invested more and taken greater steps than had previously been taken.

Regarding our \$258 million investment into housing, more than 250 homes are under construction. This includes another \$34 million-worth of community housing grants, which will deliver another 300 new homes over coming years. We are also progressing other priority investments, and housing will receive a share of the \$50 million that we set aside for urgent maintenance, or other 'screwdriver and paintbrush ready' projects that can get people back into work.

We have a strong pipeline. I reject the criticism that has been made, and confirm to the House that as we move forward through this, we will look to bring forward investment where we can. We will look to target the areas with highest need, but importantly also where those projects are going to employ the most Tasmanians. This is vitally important, because it is the Tasmanians right now who were engaged five weeks ago who have had their lives completely turned upside down, and we need to ensure we focus on them. It is them and their families and their children who are bearing the brunt of this, so we will work very hard to ensure we bring forward investment where it can reasonably be done so, and importantly, ensure that it goes into the area of greatest need.

COVID-19 - Access to Social Housing

Mrs RYLAH question to MINISTER for HOUSING, Mr JAENSCH

[11.09 a.m.]

Can you please update the House on how the Government -

Ms O'Connor - What?

Madam SPEAKER - Order. Let's be fair. This is the way it is played.

Mrs RYLAH - Can the minister please update the House on how the Government is delivering to increase access to social -

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER - Order. I have not had to raise my voice in a long time, but I do ask that we have respect for someone when they are on their feet.

Mrs RYLAH - Can the minister please update the House on how the Government is delivering to increase access to social housing, reduce homelessness, and improve housing supply across Tasmania, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic?

ANSWER

Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, Mrs Rylah, for her question and her interest in this important topic. I note that this is an issue that has been raised by others as well, so it is clearly a matter of interest and importance in the media, in this place, for at least two other parties, and I am very happy to contribute to the response to those questions today.

In the midst of the coronavirus emergency, this Government understands our responsibility to build houses to deliver outcomes for Tasmanians in need of housing sooner and to support our building sector and economy as demand slows in the private sector. That is why we remain committed to continue to deliver our existing, multifaceted plan to build more housing and to consider what other measures can be taken to deliver outcomes for Tasmania and Tasmanians sooner.

Our existing plan delivers an unprecedented state investment of \$258 million into social and affordable housing over eight years. Right now, this means we have a pipeline of more than 250 homes under construction and, as was recently announced, another \$34 million in Community Housing grants, which will deliver around 300 additional homes, made possible by the Commonwealth housing debt-waver agreement.

We are also progressing other priority investments, which are keeping people in work now and keeping the pipeline full, including the Wirksworth Estate Integrated Aged Care facility, the expansion of the Magnolia House Womens' Shelter, and conversion of the Waratah Hotel into a supported accommodation facility. We have also recently announced the bringing forward of funds to deliver other priority projects sooner, including two new youth foyers, one in Burnie and one in Hobart, the expansion of Thyme House in Launceston and the construction of transitional units as part of a youth-at-risk project in Launceston based on the successful Colville Place model in West Moonah.

We are also progressing our commitment to extend our current agreements with four community housing providers through to 2040, providing long-term certainty for the community housing sector. We are also transferring the management of a further 2000 Housing Tasmania-owned properties to these four providers, which means that community housing providers will access an additional \$6 million of Commonwealth rent assistance each year. This additional revenue, over a longer time frame, is expected to result in an estimated 700 new social and affordable houses delivered over the term of those agreements, whilst also meaning that the transferred properties will receive upgrades sooner. Also, 18 new temporary supported-accommodation units at Bethlehem House are now being tenanted, and ten new two-bedroom units are being installed at the Hobart Women's Shelter.

I am also pleased to share today that the draft Huntingfield master plan is due to be released for public consultation in coming days. The draft master plan outlines an innovative 470-lot subdivision that will deliver new homes across a range of sizes, price points, ownership and tenancy types, including social and affordable housing, that is provided in a considered way to promote positive community outcomes. The community has been keen to see the draft plan to provide comment and we are looking forward to engaging with them further.

Regarding homelessness, last week we announced an additional \$4.3 million to expand housing and homelessness support services across the state. This includes extending the Safe Night Space Program from an overnight service for people sleeping rough in Hobart into a 24/7 Safe Space Service offering wrap around services in Hobart, Launceston, and Burnie. We are also providing extra funds to expand Housing Connect's capacity to provide emergency brokered accommodation in hotels, motels, and cabins statewide. This funding will also deliver increased mental health support and ancillary services for clients who need them.

My department is working hard to ramp up delivery of our share of the \$50 million Public Buildings Maintenance Fund announced in the stimulus package. Under this fund, \$8 million of maintenance works and upgrades to public housing has been activated with maintenance works being rolled out as fast as possible across the state, including new heat pumps that will make homes more comfortable and cheaper to heat as we head into winter.

Not only will these initiatives help more Tasmanians into a home or improve their standard of living, but it will also create more jobs in the construction and housing sector. We will continue to revise time frames for our capital works programs and bring forward as much as possible to continue providing stimulus for the building and construction industry and more and better homes for Tasmanians who need them.

I am proud of this work. I thank the House for the opportunity to provide this update today and will also note in closing Ms O'Connor's earlier comments on our Major Projects Bill and her strong preference for complex projects to be assessed by panels appointed by the independent Tasmanian Planning Commission. I am very pleased this morning to confirm for Ms O'Connor that is exactly what the Major Projects Bill proposes. I look forward to the Greens enthusiastic support for the bill when it is tabled.

Time expired.

MOTION

Sitting Times and Dates

[11.17 a.m.]

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

- (1) For this day's sitting, the House shall not stand adjourned at 5.25 p.m. and may sit past such time; and
- (2) The House, at its rising, adjourn until Wednesday, 3 June next at 10 a.m.

Madam Speaker, from the outset I indicate the Government intends to sit again on a day earlier than on the currently published sitting calendar - that would be Wednesday 3 June and the intention would be that would be two-day sitting with Question Time and the usual Order of Business.

I am continually grateful for the capacity of my colleagues around the Chamber in relation to the way we are conducting the affairs of this House. With the unusual times I appreciate it has been a changing circumstance from time to time and the flexibility that has been afforded around the House is genuinely appreciated by the Government.

In June, in the pre-COVID-19 circumstance, the intention was we would have four sitting weeks in June if you included the Budget reply week and the budget Estimates week. If you counted them all together it would be four weeks. With the budget now deferred to later in the year we are continuing to review what the sitting calendar ought to look like, particularly in the second half of 2020.

In light of that, together with the fact that the Government needs to review its legislative agenda going forward, we propose now to sit not three but four days in June - 3 and 4 June and again on 24 and 25 June. That would provide four sitting days in June, as opposed to the three that has been previously canvassed by e-mail and offline with colleagues around the Chamber.

I make it very clear with each of those days the intention would be to have the normal Orders of Business including Question Time. It also provides for the continuation of our interim arrangements that are settled in the Sessional Orders.

I again make the point that if and when, indeed I should say when, the state of emergency circumstance is lifted, as a Government we intend to immediately get back to the normal forms of the House and to set aside those current interim Sessional Orders. If that were to happen over the winter recess, we intend to proceed back to the ordinary calendar and with the ordinary and expected traditional forms of the House.

I repeat how grateful we are. We are all giving in this process. The Government has set aside its legislative program. We have given a general commitment that we will not be bringing in legislation unless it is absolutely urgent or related to the COVID-19 emergency.

I fully expect that we will revisit this matter and, in so doing, I expect to speak to Mr O'Byrne, Ms O'Connor and Ms Ogilvie if those circumstances require it. I thank in advance members of the House, not only those mentioned, but all members for any input or feedback you would like to provide to me or the Premier. We are always happy to consider your suggestions.

[11.21 a.m.]

Mr O'BYRNE (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I acknowledge the motion and the proposal that has been put forward by the Government to facilitate sittings in these extraordinary times. We had a bit of a hiccup last week but we have worked through this. The two sitting days this week have worked well to allow the business of the House to occur and to allow both Houses to deal with the matters that were before it. They were very complex bills and we will be waiting here today for the upper House to complete their work.

During these times, it is important that the people of Tasmania know that we are working together in the best interests of the community to facilitate these emergency bills. This not only enables the Government to do its work but ensures that there is transparency and that the role of parliament continues to ask questions of the Government about the decisions they are making. We have made some extraordinary decisions and allocated significant power to the Executive. That must not be seen as a rubber stamp. It must not be seen without caveat. The role of parliament is to ensure that those powers are executed diligently and appropriately in the context in which they were given from these Houses.

The normal course of events would be that we would be heading into the budget weeks, a series of weeks where not only do we sit to debate and pass the budget but there is an Estimates week that has been vacated. In the normal course of events, once those matters are resolved we go into the

winter recess after a very intense period of sitting weeks of this House to enable members to get back to their electorates and to work through the various commitments we have outside the commitments inside parliament.

We will not be having an intense period of sitting to consider the Tasmanian State Budget. That has been deferred until later in the year. We acknowledge the reasons for that and agree with that. The Government has given a commitment that extra sitting times shall be allocated when the budget is scheduled later in the year, no doubt post the federal budget. We understand that will be in October. The net sitting days for the scrutiny of the budget will not be reduced, which is crucially important for this place.

We are not in a normal winter recess. We have not gone through an intense period of sitting and scrutiny of the budget. Our view has always been that if we are able to come together safely, and we have established that we can do that, and that we are able to work through we need to give the Government the flexibility to be called back if there are bills and if there are matters that this House needs to deal with.

Whilst we understand the nature of the House and where the numbers lie, we are of the view that we should be sitting on a more regular basis and not necessarily have a winter recess. We understand the Government's view and the allocation of sitting days in June compared to what we agreed to a week or so ago. It is our view that the winter recess is probably not an appropriate time for us not to be in this place. Having said that, we understand the will of the Government and the numbers in this House so that is more for the record.

We have had a discussion with the Leader of Government Business on this. The Government has made its position clear and we think that the two days for the two sitting weeks in June are appropriate, the Wednesdays and Thursdays. That gives us an extra day.

But our view, for the record, is that we should be coming back on a fortnightly basis, at least, to touch base, to check in. That gives the Government the flexibility to not have to invoke the powers of the Government to bring back parliament, just in case.

Mr Ferguson - We may well.

Mr O'BYRNE - By interjection, the Leader of Government Business, says we may well. In our view, then, that strengthens our argument to allow at least a fortnightly sitting so that the people of Tasmania can be convinced that appropriate scrutiny can be applied. We must remember that the role of parliament is not just to deal with Government business. It is to deal with the business of the people of Tasmania, and that is about transparency and appropriate questions and accountability for the Executive arm of this Westminster parliament.

With that, we accept the position put forward. We have made our points, and we will let the debate continue.

[11.26 a.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, we are prepared to support this motion, and look forward to the extra sitting days. We look forward to the extra opportunities for scrutiny and debate. We do not look forward to another eight Dorothy Dix questions, which is one of the effects of this motion.

I simply reflect on this morning. We had more than 20 minutes of question time dedicated to Government members asking Government ministers to effectively make public relations announcements. In fact, Mrs Petrusma had two questions - the same number of questions as the key crossbench party in this place, the Greens. We look forward to more opportunities for scrutiny and debate.

I want to make a point about the operations of this House and the matters that we raise. Of course we must focus on the health emergency, and on the lives and wellbeing of the people of Tasmania. All members need to work together to be part of that united response to the public health emergency that we are in. We can deal with the health emergency and also talk about Tasmania's social and economic recovery.

I was very disappointed in the Premier's answer this morning in response to Dr Woodruff's question. It is entirely legitimate to raise the matter of 23 medical professionals from the north-west coast of Tasmania writing to the Premier about post-COVID-19 Tasmania, about the need to protect our forests and to have a safe climate for our children. As medical professionals, they understand very well the link between public health and the health of the environment and a safe climate. We should be able to raise those issues with the Government in question time, and not be accused of running some ideological argument. It is not ideological to encourage a safe climate and the protection of old forests.

Even if you believe that it is ideological, we have the major projects legislation, which is a corporate ideology about controlling the planning system. We have an ideology which believes that trashing biodiverse carbon-rich forests in a climate emergency - at public expense - when we have an adequate plantation resource, is sensible policy. It is not. It is ideological.

We will ask questions that are raised with us in this place, whether or not they are related to the public health emergency situation that we are in. That is us doing our job for our constituents and stakeholders. If the Greens were not in here that letter written by 23 experienced and dedicated health professionals on the north-west coast of Tasmania would not be brought to parliament's attention. The matters they raise are of extreme significance to the people of Tasmania, and our future, post-COVID-19.

I encourage the Government not to have a crack at members who are not entirely focused on what the Government wants us to focus on. We are all in here to represent the people of Tasmania and that is what the Greens will do. We look forward to seeing everyone in here and seeing everyone's pretty faces, on 3 June.

[11.29 a.m.]

Ms OGILVIE (Clark) - Madam Speaker, I will make a short contribution. I will be supporting this motion. All of us in this Chamber have been very agile, very creative and very solid in working out how to work in this new normal. For the record, I was not keen on parliament recessing. I spoke at length about how I thought we could manage it. We could do it remotely, we could do digitally, we could do it in other formats and ways. It may be that post-August, which is our date for effective resumption, we still need to look at those options. Now we know what this virus is about and how we have to go about our daily business, some long-range social distancing and other measures may need to stay in place. I have been giving that some thought.

I am very grateful to the Government. I have sought to negotiate and land my voice to the request for at least the two days. There was a bit of a snafu. My first instinct in this place during

this crisis period, which is a very unusual time in Tasmanian history, is to seek to negotiate. I will always do that because as parliamentarians we are here try to get the best outcomes we can. It is not business as usual.

For the record, I appreciate Mr O'Byrne reaching out to me to have discussions. That was helpful and a show of good faith. I will be supporting the motion. I will not stop hassling the Government for a more effective return and resumption. We do not always agree on these matters but I am allowed to go in pretty hard because that is the job of an MP. That is all I want to say. We are living the new normal. The arrangements we have in place may need to continue for some time. Some of the planning about returning to school, infrastructure projects and economics needs to be happening in this place. I would like to participate helpfully in that.

[11.32 a.m.]

Ms WHITE (Lyons - Leader of the Opposition) - Madam Speaker, for the record, the Labor Party would like to see this parliament sit every fortnight. We are in a state of emergency and it -

Ms O'Connor - Move an amendment.

Ms WHITE - You have just said you would support that. Move an amendment? I will then. We think we should be coming back on 20 May, which is a fortnight's time. The Government has said it would like to resume on 3 June. Given that we are in a state of emergency, the Subordinate Legislation Committee is meeting but they do not have the authority to scrutinise the orders from Public Health or State Controller. There are gaps. It is appropriate that we have the opportunity to come to this place and for the Government to have the flexibility it might need if there are particular matters that come up in the next fortnight that need to be resolved. If so, we would be here ready and willing to support the Government in that endeavour, to save lives and protect our community,

For the parliament to act, as it always has, to provide a voice for people to raise their issues and to make sure that the views from across our community can be brought to this Chamber and debated, I seek an amendment that the House return on 20 May, in good faith, to work with the Government to provide them with the flexibility they need in a fortnight's time to deal with other issues that might come up. Things are changing rapidly. We also think it is necessary for the parliament to sit to provide a voice for people to ensure there is transparency of decision making, there is accountability for decision making, and there is scrutiny of those decisions.

We have worked out how to sit safely. Everyone has felt comfortable being here the past couple of days and we have made arrangements for this to work. There is no reason why we should not sit more frequently in a sensible way that is not going to put unnecessary pressure on the Government to be here every week. We respect there are other responsibilities, particularly that the Premier has at this time with his National Cabinet obligations. Sitting on Wednesday, 20 May, would be sensible given we are in a state of emergency. That gives the Government the flexibility it needs and gives the people of Tasmania an appropriate voice in their parliament.

Madam Speaker, I move the following amendment -

Omit 'Wednesday, 3 June' and insert instead 'Wednesday, 20 May'.

The House divided -

AYES 9

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

NOES 11

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

PAIRS

Ms Butler
Ms Houston

Mr Barnett
Mr Shelton

Amendment negatived.

[11.41 a.m.]

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) - Madam Speaker, in speaking to the substantive motion, I put on the record the disappointment we feel. There was no malice in moving that amendment. We do not feel that it would undermine in any way the ability of the Government to do the work it has to do and under the extraordinary powers they have been granted by this House and the other House. We are disappointed that the Government and its coalition partner have chosen to vote in a way that ensures this parliament is not granted the scrutiny that it should be allowed.

Madam Speaker, I advise the House that we will be writing to the Premier on the matter of the sitting scheduling of the House to seek that the Premier recognises that it is appropriate, given that the only other forum that could examine the decisions of government outside of parliament is, a committee of the House that does not have the power to examine those decisions.

The Subordinate Legislation Committee has sought the power to have further engagement and scrutiny of the orders delivered under health and emergency powers granted by this House to the Government through the State Controller. That has been denied, not been accepted, by the Government.

It is appropriate for this House to apply scrutiny and we will be writing to the Premier, outside of the drama that might exist in this House, to ask him in the cold light of day to reflect upon whether it is appropriate that the parliament is denied the opportunity to continue to perform its role.

As has been stated already on the record, the role of sitting in parliament is not only to pass legislation of the government of the day. The role of the parliament is to scrutinise not only that legislation but other decisions that are made outside of that legislative framework; other actions of the government. That is what we are called to do and it is disappointing that we have to write to

the Premier to seek that. We hope that the Government and their coalition partner decide more appropriately to allow parliament to do its job in the future.

Motion agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

[11.44 a.m.]

Mr FERGUSON (Bass - Leader of Government Business - Motion) - Mr Deputy Speaker, we will now allow the Legislative Council to consider and continue its own deliberations. For best practice, we will await their consideration. I move -

That the Speaker do now leave the Chair until the ringing of the Division Bells.

The House suspended from 11.44 a.m. to 8.56 p.m.

COVID-19 DISEASE EMERGENCY (COMMERCIAL LEASES) BILL 2020 (No. 19)

Bill returned from the Legislative Council with amendments.

COVID-19 DISEASE EMERGENCY (COMMERCIAL LEASES) BILL 2020 (No. 19)

In Committee

Council amendments to clause 32(7) -

Ms ARCHER - Madam Chair, I move -

That the Council amendments to clause 32(7) be agreed to.

I thank the other place for staying back and considering this bill, given that it is a COVID-19 emergency bill that deals with commercial leases. It is disappointing that they saw fit to amend the provisions in this bill. I understand that these things are always moved with the best of intentions. I was in the other place listening to the entire debate and I must say that in closing, my comments were that as a government we were fairly steadfast, and for a very good reason.

These bills are being dealt with because we are in unprecedented times. The subject matter of commercial leases per se may not, to some members, feel as urgent as some other matters we have been dealing with, for example, to do with health, but they are, as a consequence of this emergency in unprecedented and challenging times, and I thank both Houses for the goodwill and good faith that has been shown. However I feel that that good faith is slightly wearing off.

The Government will not be opposing this, although I believe there has been an unnecessary roadblock placed in front of the Government in this particular circumstance. As I said in my second reading speech, and as the Leader for the Government in the upper House said in her second reading speech, we assure members not only in this House and the other place but wherever possible,

everything that normally goes to the Subordinate Legislation Committee by way of the guidelines will be complied with, but there may be occasion when that cannot be complied with.

I understand Ms Forrest, the member for Murchison, moved the amendment. I know she has been on that committee for a long time. I and many others in this place have also served on that committee and it does very valuable work. I do not seek, or would not seek, to take away from the normal process ordinarily, but this was put in for very good reason, with the assurance that we would only not ever follow part of the guidelines, namely what we were dealing with here in relation to sections 4 or 5 of the Subordinate Legislation Act 1992.

I want to make it clear that the Government was seeking to do that only because of these extraordinary circumstances, and only in the extraordinary circumstance that we could not comply with the guidelines, so that we would not have to go through a process. Those who have served in government know there is a process you go through before you issue certificates. It may be very easy and blasé to say that it is a certificate that contains not many lines, but we all know that there is a process that goes with producing such a certificate. In this process, it would not only go through my department but the department of the Treasurer as well before we get to providing that certificate to the committee. I can take it on assurance that the Subordinate Legislation Committee has never refused such a certificate but there are occasions where that may not apply.

I believe I have made my point. As I have said, the Government will not be opposing this amendment in the interests of respecting the decision of the other place. However, I would like to remind members that when we are dealing with these COVID-19 bills these requests of the Government are being done for particular purposes and I would not like to see the good faith that has been shown eroded by any distrust in that process.

Ms O'Connor - It's not about distrust. It's about making sure it is good legislation that goes through.

Ms ARCHER - I said, Ms O'Connor, that I would not like to see, so please do not take my words out of context.

Ms STANDEN - Mr Deputy Chair, on behalf of the Opposition I indicate that we are happy to accept the amendments made in the other place. The arguments were well made by the member for Murchison in relation to this and we are happy to leave it at that.

Ms O'CONNOR - Mr Deputy Chair, of course we will be supporting this amendment. I listened very carefully to what the minister just said and it is a fact, Ms Archer, that a majority of members in the upper House agree with you completely and supported Ms Forrest's amendment. It is worth pointing out that Ms Forrest, the member for Murchison, is arguably one of the most seasoned legislators in this building, upstairs or downstairs.

I listened to that debate very carefully too and, unfortunately for the Government, the case not to accept the amendment was very poorly prosecuted. The best the Leader of Government Business could say was, 'We are in a pandemic, it is an emergency, we do not have time for these sorts of processes'. I am compressing what Mrs Hiscutt said. The fact is, Ms Archer, and to every member of Government, these are Houses of parliament and we are here as professional legislators. Legislation is presented to these Houses for scrutiny and debate and it will not always come back to you exactly the way it was tabled. That is the democratic legislative process.

Ms Archer - I accepted that. I believe I was quite diplomatic.

Ms O'CONNOR - I did not buy Mrs Hiscutt's argument because it was not strong. What Ms Forrest said very clearly - and she is on the Subordinate Legislation Committee and is the most recent past Chair - is that the process for the Treasurer in this instance saying to the Subordinate Legislation Committee, 'We are not in a position to do a regulatory impact statement', is a very short process with an almost pro forma form.

If the Government has the time to prepare notices, orders and those sorts of instruments, it has the time to do the administrative scrutiny work which at least tells the Subordinate Legislation Committee that there will not be a regulatory impact statement that goes off to the Expenditure Review Unit beforehand.

There is a lot of goodwill in this place but we will not be a rubber stamp. We will not be, we cannot be and we must not be, because we have already entrusted to Government the most sweeping powers the Tasmanian Parliament has given to the Executive since World War II. We have already done that.

If a member in one of these Houses, who is a professional legislator says, 'Hang on a minute, this is slight overreach', then we have to respect that. It is one more check and balance in a circumstance where many checks and balances have been removed, where the Subordinate Legislation Committee is hamstrung in its capacity to look at subordinate legislation, to look at those instruments that hang under legislation. The Subordinate Legislation Committee is not able to look at notices - I made this point the other day - so to take away another little layer of scrutiny from the remaining layers we have in place was overreach.

I understand when you are a government dealing with a situation like this, it is a pandemic and your job is to keep people safe, so you want to be able to do things as quickly and efficiently as possible, but you have to have those layers of scrutiny in there. It is not about distrust at all. I did not hear anything in Ms Forrest's contribution that was about mistrust -

Ms Archer - I didn't say that. I said I would not like to see distrust.

Ms O'CONNOR - That is right. I accept what you are saying; we are all tired. I understand that. It is not about distrust, but it was about spotting, at worst, overreach and at best, an unnecessary set of words in that clause. We need to accept this amendment, move on and accept that we are in a bicameral parliament. I believe the legislation through this amendment has been somewhat improved.

Council amendments agreed to.

Reported the Committee had resolved to agree to the Council amendments.

Resolution agreed to.

BIOSECURITY (CONSEQUENTIAL AND TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS) BILL 2020 (No. 20)

First Reading

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

MOTION

Note - COVID-19 Emergency

[9.11 a.m.]

Ms O'BYRNE (Bass) - Madam Speaker, I have a message for the staff of the Launceston General Hospital, and that is to say thank you. Staff at the LGH have not only been managing the demand of their local community but have taken on almost all the north-west load during the closure and deep clean. They have done this with professionalism. They have adapted their work practices to respond to COVID-19 and have redesigned their hospital to operate in a safe environment under these circumstances.

Thank you to our medical and nursing staff, our cleaning staff, our orderlies and catering staff, and the very many allied health professionals who so often get forgotten when we give our thanks to hospital staff.

Some will say they are doing their job, and that is true. However, we owe them our thanks and respect and we also owe them a commitment that we shall appropriately support them now and into the future. Let us now commit to not just saying thanks and feeling a bit better about ourselves. Let us commit to giving them what they deserve; safe working environments and resourcing, safe workloads and decent pay.

I also want to give our thanks to the paramedics who have worked across the north to ensure the timely transfer of patients to the LGH emergency department, by road and by air. It has meant many more hours on the road, very long days, and unfortunately too much time being ramped at the LGH. To those workers we also owe our gratitude and a commitment to safe resourcing, safe workloads and fair pay.

On the theme of Tasmanian workers, I am extremely disappointed that the Government has refused to accept the very reasonable request to include workers' representation on the committee to steer Tasmania's economic recovery. The failure to include the union movement is a significant oversight. The Premier today dismissed it by saying that lots of stakeholders wanted to be included.

Can I say that not including the very people who will be asked to return to work to ensure safe working environments and to ensure community confidence in their operations is a grievous mistake, and I urge the Premier to reconsider this position. Just as he has acted to ensure that the voices of children are heard, this Government must equally ensure that we hear the voices of those workers we depend upon.

Further, the Government will need to urgently increase resourcing to our already overstretched WorkSafe Tasmania to ensure that the appropriate support and monitoring is delivered to make sure our businesses, our workers and our consumers are safe as we eventually reopen. SafeWork Australia has developed an excellent range of checklist information and advice specific to individual sectors. The suite of documents and information has been agreed to by all state health and safety regulators.

This being the case, business and workers should be confident that by following that information they will ensure that they have met their legislative obligations and their legal duties. However, businesses will require help, particularly those in regional communities. WorkSafe Tasmania needs to be resourced to ensure the adaptation of the guidelines and the monitoring of

compliance. We all want to get back to work and we need to make sure we support everyone to do the right thing, but also, should the right thing not be done, inadvertently or deliberately, that we can act quickly to enforce those safe rules and maintain consumer confidence.

On the subject of safety, as we ask people to stay home and save lives, it is important that we recognise that home is not always safe for everyone. On a good day in Australia, police respond to a family violence call every two minutes. In a good week in Australia, at least one woman will die as a result of violence, often at the hand of a former or current intimate partner. These are not good times. Across the world, as isolation lockdowns have rightly been implemented, homes have become pressure cookers and that has led to a silent spike in the rates of family violence.

In March this year Google recorded a 75 per cent increase in searches for family violence support. A Queensland company that specialises in housing removals for those fleeing violence has had a 60 per cent increase in demand. A New South Wales report has shown a 40 per cent increase in demand for family violence support services and a 70 per cent increase in the complexity of family violence cases.

Tasmanian services report difficulty accessing those they already support and increasing complexity of cases. Police in Tasmania report that at this stage they are not getting more calls about violence; they are having the same or even less. However, that is not good news. It tells us that those people who need protection from family violence are unable to ask for it. That silence does not signal a decrease in abuse, but an increase in control and coercion.

People experiencing family violence are now, in many cases, stuck at home with the perpetrator of violence, all day, every day. Phone calls, text messages, emails and social media are all easy to monitor, cutting off options for anyone desperately seeking help.

It is a wicked problem that some countries have grappled with using innovative ideas. In New Zealand, they have a collaboration between supermarkets and services. People can ask for support at the supermarket counter.

In the United Kingdom, callers to emergency lines can dial an additional 55 when they ring, and police will know that it is a family violence situation without them having to say a word.

One of the reasons we have been able to respond so well to COVID-19 is because we have looked at international experience of what works in defeating the virus. We must also look to international experience in family violence. Every day in homes across the state the conditions are ripe for harm. People need to know that it is safe to call for help and they should call for help.

The Government has allocated additional funding and that is welcome, but we need to ensure that frontline community services are not just funded to cover the existing unmet demand, but resourced to provide support for a significant wave of demand and complexity for an extended period of time.

In the few moments left to me, I want to read in this piece that is circulated on social media. I do not know the author. I have slightly adapted it for our circumstances.

I heard that we are all in the same boat but it is not like that. We are all in the same storm, but not in the same boat. Your ship could be shipwrecked and mine might not be. Or vice versa.

For some, quarantine is optimal. A moment of reflection, a reconnection, trackie bottoms and a cocktail. For others it is a desperate financial and family crisis.

Some are alone and lonely, some have those they love far away, while for others it is peace, rest and time with their close family members. Some are bringing in more money to their household, some are working more hours for less money due to pay cuts or loss in sales, and some have lost everything. Some families received stimulus support, while others got none. Some are concerned about the delayed the arrival of their online shopping while others are concerned they have enough bread and milk to last the weekend.

Some want to go back desperately because they are running out of money and others want to kill those who break the quarantine or call for restrictions to be lifted.

Some are home spending hours each day helping a child with online schooling while others are spending hours each day to support their children on top of the 10-12-hour work day.

Some have experienced the near death from the virus; some have already lost someone from it, and some are not sure if their loved ones are going to make it. Others do not believe it is a big deal. Some have faith and expect miracles, others fear the worst is yet to come.

We are not all in the same boat. We are going through a different time where our perceptions and needs are different. We need to support people through that.

Time expired.

[9.18 p.m.]

Ms ARCHER (Clark - Minister for Building and Construction) - Madam Speaker, I want to talk briefly tonight on the response for workplaces, being the minister responsible under Building and Construction for workplace health and safety among other things under that portfolio.

The Tasmanian Government is aware of the significant impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on all Tasmanians. Ms Byrne just brought it home then in terms of people's different reaction to behaviours throughout the time. Everyone is different and everybody has a different situation.

We understand that many businesses and workplaces over the past couple of months have been affected by national restrictions, necessarily imposed, of course, but resulting in constraints to their usual operation, or complete closure. As we move close toward lifting restrictions imposed by COVID-19, our Government is committed to supporting businesses to enable their continued operation or reopening of operations in a safe manner while continuing to manage and mitigate COVID-19 risks. We need to ensure that the health and safety of all Tasmanian workers is protected against harm from the risk of COVID-19. That is our priority.

The recovery from COVID-19 emergency is a national focus. Many businesses that operate in Tasmania are part of national or even international organisations. The need for a nationally

consistent approach wherever possible is recognised by national Cabinet, with agreement to the national COVID-19 safe workplace principles.

As minister responsible for work health and safety, I was pleased to endorse those principles that will ensure all workplaces have a clear framework from which to develop plans to ensure employers can control the risks of COVID-19. Through the establishment of the principles, Safe Work Australia is hosting an essential hub of work health and safety guidance and tools that Australian workplaces can use to successfully form the basis of their management for the health and safety risks posed by COVID-19.

These guidance materials have been developed through substantial consultation with public health experts and industry, unions and work health and safety regulators including WorkSafe Tasmania. I encourage all members to visit the Safe Work Australia website and familiarise themselves with the information that can be sourced on an industry-specific basis for all of your constituents and stakeholders.

As to the transition to recovery, our recovery in Tasmania from COVID-19 hinges on strategies for both economic and social reactivation. While some degree of physical distancing is going to be part of our way of life for some time, at least until a vaccine or effective treatment is found, the Government is hopeful that in coming weeks we will be able to move in gradual steps back towards some measure of normality for our lifestyles and returning to work.

In order to begin easing restrictions, the Government has announced it is putting in place four safeguards. First, expanded testing is one of the crucial precedent conditions. We welcome the critically important partnership between the Australian Government, the Minderoo Foundation and private pathology providers.

This partnership has successfully secured an additional 10 million COVID-19 test kits and more pathology equipment for use around the country. Testing efforts have ramped up significantly in Tasmania.

Second, our manual tracing efforts over the past weeks have worked well, particularly in fighting the north west outbreak. However, we need help from all Tasmanians to improve our tracing capability. I refer people to the tracing app COVIDSafe.

Third, we are putting in place localised rapid response capabilities that could be implemented in regions or industry-specific sites if required. This is to enhance current public health capabilities in response to an outbreak. Rapid response teams will help trace, track and quarantine the virus wherever our enhanced testing finds it. Teams have been recruited from across health and public sectors and will be able to be stood up quickly whenever an outbreak occurs.

Finally, and importantly in my portfolio, we are developing COVID-19 safe plans which will help make our workplaces, public spaces and as many places as safe as they can be. As restrictions ease, these plans will help to ensure there are rules and policies in place so that they can operate safely and limit the risk of coronavirus infection to staff and customers.

Making sure workplaces are able to manage the risk of transmission for virus is also critical to enabling increased movement of people and the removal of restrictions. The Government's safe workplace framework has been established to give effect to the nationally agreed principles through introducing minimum COVID-19 safety standards based on public health advice and providing

guidance to industry on how they can make sure their workplaces are complying with the minimum standards.

The implementation of the framework is being coordinated by the State Control Centre's recovery team, with WorkSafe Tasmania and State Growth leading the work health and safety initiatives and industry engagement respectively.

WorkSafe Tasmania is the home of workplace health and safety as the regulator. It is already working across industry to ensure workplaces are controlling the risks to workplaces from COVID-19. Through the provisions of advice and information on the dedicated work site and help line, workers, employers and community members have been seeking support to solve COVID-19 work health and safety issues. WorkSafe Tasmania inspectors are continuing to visit those essential services and businesses still operating to support them in providing a safe workplace for their workers and community members.

It is encouraging and very pleasing that many workplaces are already investing significant time and effort in providing a COVID-19 safe workplace. Many industry peak bodies, such as MBA, HIA, THA to name only a few, are providing their members and non-members with significant assistance and guidance. I thank them for their continued efforts across industries and businesses.

As the restrictions are lifted and more businesses reopen, WorkSafe Tasmania will continue to respond to concerns about safety and workplaces and provide education and information to help workplaces comply. Workplace inspections have been and will continue to be a feature of a compliance program. As always, a reasonable and commonsense approach to compliance will be taken, with enforcement action considered only in the most serious cases.

We understand that we are in uncharted territory with this pandemic. For many employers and employees, a new way of doing things must be put in place.

The Tasmanian Government is investing in the future of Tasmania and the safety of workers and community members. I particularly thank WorkSafe Tasmania, the Department of State Growth and the State Control Centre's recovery team for the significant support they are providing to the recovery effort. I especially applaud those employers and employees who have helped to keep Tasmania running during these very difficult social and economic circumstances and those who will reopen and are essential to our recovery.

[9.25 p.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I return to the letter that was written by 23 doctors from the north-west region in Tasmania, who have been at the forefront of the coronavirus pandemic in Tasmania, and still are. These were GPs and emergency doctors, some of whose names I recognise as they have been in contact with me - and I daresay with other members - with questions and concerns and ideas throughout the last couple of months about the progress of the pandemic and the way it has been managed.

It is very clear that they are dedicating every moment of their working day to caring for people. I know one of those people has self-quarantined because he has been personally treating patients with coronavirus and has not wanted to take the risk of introducing the virus to his family. There is another patient at the Mersey hospital who is being treated at the moment.

Amidst the work that these people are doing and continue to do for people in the north-west, for all of us, in keeping us safe in this pandemic, they also recognise the importance of looking to the future, as are we all. As we think of stepping out and being at the crossroads that we are as a country and the decisions that we are making over the next few days which will be so important for our new future and for the longer term for us as a state, they are concerned about our prosperity. Fundamentally they are concerned about the health and wellbeing of their patients and their communities. That is why they compiled a letter and addressed it to the Premier with their concerns about the continuing heating of the climate and our response to that.

They recognise that this continuing warming of the planet - it is now heating of the planet - is at a point which is causing loss of life, mental health problems, permanent loss of livelihood across regional communities in Tasmania, Australia and the whole planet. Whilst this pandemic is ongoing the climate has continued to keep warming, communities around the world have dealt with bushfires, floods and storms and people have lost their lives. Crops have failed to produce, droughts have increased; this is not going away and these doctors understand that.

They want us to be looking to a recovery from coronavirus, an economic recovery, which puts the climate crisis front and centre with the virus economic recovery. The two are adjoined together and we look at them as one. These are two crises which the global community is facing.

I found the Premier's response to the question that we asked this morning, surprising and very concerning. The Premier has said at almost every single press conference that I have listened to, which has been every single day he has given one, 'I take my advice from the health experts, I listen to the health evidence. That is why I am doing and taking the hard decisions I am taking.'

He has been policy driven, leadership driven by health experts in a health crisis. Yet this is the same Premier who dismissed the concern of these health professionals who were talking about another health issue. This other health issue is the quality of life for their patients; the future wellbeing of their communities if we do not also act on the climate crisis.

Where is the Premier's response? Where is the Premier listening to the climate experts? Why is the Premier not listening to the climate evidence? Why is he not looking at the evidence which is overwhelming in Tasmania, from our amazing Tasmanian climate scientists, who are world-leading. Also, from the whole global climate science community, the thousands of scientists in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) who have made it very clear that we have a deadline and it is 10 years away. This is the year, 2020, the year of action.

They told us that two years ago. Here we are, in 2020. We have two crises we are confronting as a global species. We may recover from one, but will we recover from the other? Unless we come out of this economic devastation - that we are really only at the cusp of experiencing as a state - without a focus to managing the climate crisis at the same time, we are doomed to have the worst of all economic recoveries. We can never recover as a community, as a state, unless we address the damaging impacts that are coming, and will continue to come, as the climate heating builds.

We have great support across the Australian business sector for doing exactly what I have been talking about. Just yesterday, the Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group, Innes Willox, who represents more than 60 000 businesses, made a very strong statement that the two biggest economic challenges in memory - the recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and cutting greenhouse gas emissions - have to be addressed together. By so doing, it will boost growth and put the country on a firm long-term footing.

This is not even climate scientists who are saying this. They are now being backed up by the industry groups who recognise the risk to their business and who want to work to better their employees.

Wise heads in business are calling for the Premier to take this response. Now is the time for him to listen to climate experts about the climate crisis.

Time expired.

[9.33 p.m.]

Ms STANDEN (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I begin my contribution by showing my enduring respect for all educators, whether they are educators in the early years, or throughout the primary or secondary years, or in the tertiary years. I pay my respects to all educators. It is a particularly challenging time for parents as well, trying to juggle three roles often around being a parent, a partner for some, working from home, and doing their very best to fulfil their obligations to their employers. They are also doing their best to support their students learning from home.

Particularly those parents who have kids of a range of ages, it is an extraordinarily difficult task and I tip my hat to all parents who are doing their best to fulfil their obligations and show enormous flexibility, resilience, and innovation in the way they are conducting themselves.

Touching back on educators again, I want to read out a quote from a friend who is an experienced college VET teacher. To me, this says quite a bit about the experience. This teacher has experience of well over 20 years in that role. They say:

It has been the biggest challenge of my career so far. I am wearing big, fat L- plates in this online space. The students really aren't as tech-savvy as society makes them out to be, and we are really being asked to do something out of the ordinary. I am hoping more parents realise the hours spent by teachers in their holidays to prepare for something that could be shut down tomorrow, or in nine weeks. I salute the parents, but I also salute the teachers.

I, too, salute the teachers, like that experienced teacher, and all of the parents who are doing their very best to support their students and to hold their families together in these extraordinary times.

On extraordinary efforts, I turn now to disability support workers. It may interest the House to know that the disability sector employs approximately 7900 Tasmanians. It is one of the largest employers, particularly in some of our regional towns. Unlike other sectors, it is a shared workforce within the disability sector, often working across a number of different homes as well as care settings such as disability, health and aged care, which heightens the risk and issues for those workers at this time. They care for approximately 7700 Tasmanians who have NDIS plans, and that number is projected to rise to well over 10 600 in the coming years.

Approximately one in four Tasmanians identify as dealing with a disability, so approximately 130 000 people, although it is estimated with under-reporting, particularly around psychosocial disabilities, that that number is even higher. A percentage of those, an estimated 40 000 Tasmanians, would be cared for within aged care settings, but the balance is around 90 000 people.

Currently only 10 600 Tasmanians are eligible for the NDIS. That leaves 79 400 people as an estimate of those who identify as dealing with a disability but are not eligible for the NDIS. Under

the NDIS bilateral agreement, that means that it is beholden on the state Government to offer mainstream services that support these people with services in the health system, transport, justice, education and so on.

I participated in a roundtable with a number of providers earlier this week where they talked about the challenges facing the sector at this time, and top of the list was around access to PPE. In particular they talked about the guidelines for operation and access training and use of PPE, focusing particularly on health and aged care workers and their understanding of that, given that these workers are at the frontline.

Disability workers are at the frontline too and they feel ignored. They feel they should be dealt with on the same basis as these other core frontline sectors. Fifteen providers also said they had tried to access the national stockpile initiative but were not receiving a response and were not being responding to as a matter or priority. They were having to go to extraordinary lengths such as accessing equipment through eBay and Shiploads, which really is not on.

They talked about access to COVID-19 testing as a priority and were particularly keen for their workers to be able to access that testing, even before symptoms are being seen. As we seek to increase the testing prevalence within the state, that would be a sector that would welcome that measure.

Flu vaccinations are not mandatory within the disability sector workforce and there is concern that is at odds with the aged care sector, for instance, which has to have mandatory flu vaccinations. It is an inequitable situation, with providers looking to be reimbursed on similar terms or supplied by the national stockpile.

There are ongoing issues with funding. Even before the crisis, 51 per cent of Australia's disability providers made a loss last year, so it is a massive change within the sector they are facing, with a number of providers expected to fall over during this time, particularly in regional areas. In Tasmania, members would realise that is a scary thing.

Regarding attraction and retention of workforce, particularly as it is projected that there will be substantial opportunities in this sector, it is recognised that there are additional demands around physical capability, literacy and having a driver's licence but nonetheless they are looking for support from government to boost the workforce because of the demand projected in that area. Australian Disability Enterprises employees are not eligible for JobSeeker and that is a particular issue given they are a highly casualised workforce.

Concerning transport, I was devastated to hear that there are no wheelchair accessible taxis at all in Burnie, only two in Devonport, but one at the time we spoke had broken down, and only one maxi-taxi combined in Hobart, so there are a number of issues and challenges facing that sector. I want to give a shout-out to disability support workers who are providing enormous support across the community to those Tasmanians most in need.

[9.40 p.m.]

Mr STREET (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I will be very brief, but due to the awkward standing orders that have been in place there have been limited opportunities for backbenchers to contribute. While I have the opportunity, I want to place upon the record my sincere condolences to the family, friends and communities of the 13 Tasmanians who lost their lives during this pandemic.

I guess, because of the global nature of the pandemic and the mismanagement of it in some countries, we are talking about thousands of deaths in some countries, so there has been a tendency in the last couple of days to start congratulating ourselves on what a fantastic job we have done in Australia in containing this pandemic, and whilst we have, I do not think we can forget that 13 Tasmanians have prematurely lost their life prematurely during this pandemic through no fault of their own. Also because of the restrictions we have had to put in place, in many instances, these people have died without being able to have the comfort of family and friends at their bedside before they passed away, and that is an added burden for the family and friends of these people who they are going to have to live with going forward.

To the people who have lost jobs or businesses during this pandemic, I can only say how sorry I am that has occurred, again through no fault of their own, and I am sure that every person in this place commits to them that they will spend every waking minute trying to get them back into business and back into work as quickly as possible.

I want to reflect on the institution of the National Cabinet during this pandemic and what a positive that has been for Australia. The fact that we have been able to work across ideological or party lines for the betterment of the country is one of the real positives that have come out of this pandemic. As of 6 p.m. last night, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory had had 18 deaths, which is exactly the same total as Victoria. It would have been very easy for those state governments to take an insular view of this pandemic and the actions that needed to be taken so they did not necessarily need to take the same level of action that other states that have been worse affected by this pandemic have, but there has been a real unity and sense of purpose in the National Cabinet across party lines, and every state premier should be congratulated for that.

I have to say that I did not have a massive regard for the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, before this pandemic, but his leadership of that state in extraordinary circumstances has been exemplary, and is another example to us that Labor, Liberal, Greens, Independent, it does not matter, leadership is leadership and he has been exemplary.

I have seen some criticism in the last couple of days about authoritarian governments in terms of the restrictions that have been put in place. It is really disappointing that that has come about. Whilst not of benefit, I have to say that the mismanagement of this situation in some countries has shown that the actions Australia has taken as a nation have been necessary to get the results that we have.

I read an article today that again referred to the United States and their president as the leader of the free world. I believe if there is anything that comes out of this pandemic, it should be that the United States is no longer the leader of the free world, nor is there -

Ms O'Connor - Let's reserve judgment until after November.

Mr STREET - Exactly right, at least until November. They are nothing more than a failed country, and what we see in the United States at the minute is a country that is led by somebody who unfortunately does not place any value on human life, and who talks in dollars and cents. It is a country that has no social safety net and does not look after the most vulnerable in their community, and they are a broken country, so if nothing else comes out of this pandemic, let us look to the United States as an example of what we never want to be.

We never want to be a country that leaves people behind, that has a 'survival of the fittest' mentality, because the death count in the United States is 73 000 and counting, and we have a president of that country who is congratulating himself on the job he has done.

Dr Woodruff - It is horrific.

Mr STREET - It is horrific, it is a disgrace. I do not know how some of the leaders in that country can look at themselves and consider that they are doing the right thing by the people who put them office.

To finish, Madam Speaker, the word 'goodwill' has been used a fair bit in this place. There has been a level of goodwill with the occasional wrinkle, which is to be expected when we disagree on a way forward. We are going to need that goodwill more in the future than perhaps we have needed it in dealing with the initial stages of this pandemic. Hard decisions will need to be made in the next few months as we ease restrictions and try to get the economy back on track. They are not necessarily going to be ideological divisions.

Complete economic liberalism or complete isolationist policy is not going to get to where we need to be. There is a difference between hating China and having a cautious approach towards China -

Ms O'Connor - There is also a difference between the Chinese people and the Chinese Government.

Mr STREET - Exactly right. I was really disappointed with Senator Keneally's article over the weekend, which was nothing more than a dog whistle to racist and insular thinking people. There would be people on the opposite side of this Chamber in her party who disagree with what she did and what she said. It is unfortunate that in the middle of a global pandemic it was used to try to promote the idea that we can somehow turn our back on the rest of the world and simply look after ourselves.

It has not got us to where we are now. Immigration, multiculturalism and globalisation has led us to better living standards across the globe. To simply turn our back on that because of this pandemic would be a mistake.

Motion noted.

TABLED PAPERS

Subordinate Legislation Committee - Reports

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

- (1) Scrutiny of Notices Issued under the COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 - Report No. 2.
- (2) Scrutiny of Notices Issued under the COVID-19 Disease Emergency (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 - Report No. 3.

Madam Speaker, I move -

That the reports be received.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Leatherwood Stands and Sustainable Timber Tasmania

[9.48 p.m.]

Ms O'CONNOR (Clark - Leader of the Greens) - Madam Speaker, the leatherwood tree is found only in Tasmania. It grows in cool temperate rainforests that occur in mossy forests along the north west, the west coasts and down into the south west of Tasmania; that is the wetter parts of Tasmania. They hark back to the time when Tasmania was part of a super continent called Gondwanaland, more than 65 million years ago. The leatherwood tree takes more than 70 years to grow to nectar-bearing maturity. The bees that feed off the leatherwoods in Tasmania's native forests are essential pollinators for this island's, fruit, cereal and vegetable crops. They are central to the leatherwood beekeeping sector in Tasmania.

At the Liberal State Council meeting in 2019, the north-west primary industries branch put up a motion which was clearly endorsed that says:

To ensure the retention of the remaining stands of our State's Leatherwood Tree Resources, we request an immediate moratorium/halt to any clear felling of any future Timber Coupes/Areas in our Tasmanian Rain Forests that have 10% or more of the Leatherwood Tree species within them. This State Council recommends also the re-establishment of leatherwood populations within previously harvested forest coupes in Tasmania.

The motion in its rationale bells the cat.

Even to sustain the present level of beekeeping and thereby pollination, beekeepers are already stretched and unable to meet present pollination requirements. Because the forest resource of leatherwood is diminishing due to wood harvesting methods in areas where beekeeping is permitted.

As we know, in the summer before the last one, those devastating fires that scorched so much of Tasmania, vast tracks of rainforest that contained leatherwood species were burned. This had a devastating seasonal impact on the beekeeping industry in Tasmania.

Six months ago, a memorandum of understanding between Tasmania's beekeepers, the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council and Sustainable Timber Tasmania was signed. At the time, Resources and Primary Industries minister, Mr Barnett, was in the photo opportunity. It was said that this memorandum of understanding would ensure that beekeepers have the maximum practical access to leatherwood trees on Sustainable Timber Tasmania managed land.

Unfortunately, as is the case with so many memoranda of understanding, they are rarely worth the paper they are written on. Here is the Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Australian Honey Bee Industry Council memorandum of understanding. Despite the provisions within, which commit no

party really to anything, it certainly does not commit Sustainable Timber Tasmania to retaining 10 per cent of rainforests for leatherwood. It talks about close and ongoing communication and cooperation.

Enter Mr Rodney Smith, a beekeeper from the north west, the Smithton region, whose father was a beekeeper and was hoping that that beekeeping tradition would go on in his family. Mr Rodney Smith is at the end of his tether. For a beekeeper from Smithton to come to the Greens for help, you would have to be pushed a fair way. Mr Smith is at the end of his tether because Sustainable Timber Tasmania was logging coupe number ME008B which contained vast tracks of leatherwood. They are so important to the honey industry because they flower every year. Despite the conversation back and forth between Sustainable Timber Tasmania and Mr Rodney Smith, the logging continued.

I got in touch with the minister, Mr Barnett, and pointed out that the MOU had been signed and it placed an obligation on Sustainable Timber Tasmania to look after the leatherwood stands. I urged Mr Barnett to step in and protect the leatherwood for the beekeepers of the north west and Mr Rodney Smith. The media release put out by the minister of the time said -

Beekeepers not only produce iconic leatherwood honey, a premium and exclusively Tasmania product, they also provide bees to pollinate many of our highest value fruit, cereal and vegetable crops.

You talked, Mr Barnett, about pollination services making a critical contribution with a higher economic value than honey production, which had a 2017 farmgate value for honey and bees wax of more than \$8 million and exports worth \$2.4 million.

Despite Mr Rodney Smith's concerns, despite the obvious presence of leatherwood in the coupe I cited earlier, Sustainable Timber Tasmania made it clear to Mr Smith that they were going to proceed with the logging. Mr Smith sought a meeting with Mr Barnett, who apparently told him he was disappointed that Mr Smith had made contact with the Greens. We thought perhaps there would be a path through here for Mr Smith and that some of those leatherwood trees, which grow only in Tasmania, only along that west coast strip, might be protected.

A small portion of the coupe I am talking about has not been logged and will not be logged, but leatherwood trees in the wider coupe are being logged, despite the meeting with the minister and ongoing conversation with Sustainable Timber Tasmania. Sustainable Timber Tasmania wrote to Mr Smith last week and told him that it was its intention to continue to log in that coupe.

This is madness. It undermines the brand. It makes it clear that this Government is engaging in rainforest logging. It is logging rainforests because leatherwood only grows in rainforest. It is prioritising TaAnn over Tasmania's beekeeping sector.

These forests, these rainforests are being logged for TaAnn. It is unsustainable. It is unjustifiable. It is undermining Tasmania's honey industry. There was a memorandum of understanding signed where the Tasmanian Beekeepers Association felt that finally they had made a breakthrough. They had made government listen and there would be some real efforts to protect leatherwood stands in Tasmania.

As far as we can tell, that MOU is not worth the paper it is written on. It is lip-service to allay the concerns of beekeepers and to satisfy those members of the Liberal Party who stood up at their state conference and called for a better deal for honey producers.

Mr Barnett, you can do better by beekeepers.

Fire Tower Road, Koonya - Development Application

[9.56 p.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin) - Madam Speaker, I make some comments about a development application at Fire Tower Road, Koonya, on the Tasman Peninsula. Submissions to the Tasman Council closed today.

It has caused a great deal of concern amongst local residents who have come to understand the scale of this development application. They have also come to realise, unfortunately, that the Tasmanian Planning Scheme has been written and designed to ensure that they do not have a proper assessment of the full impact of this project. They have listed a huge range of issues with this development, which is intending to build a polo field and facilities, a vineyard, a cellar door, visitor accommodation and car parking. It will also involve vegetation removal.

That needs to be put into the context of being on a property that is located on a very narrow rural road, which has a very small number of residents. It is a large-scale development that has no place in the back road rural area that it intends to establish within. At the moment this is enjoyed by small-scale farmers and residents, some who have lived there for generations.

The planning scheme, as written, does not provide the opportunity for people to make comment about social impacts. It does not provide the environmental assessments which ought to be done on a development on this scale in this particular landscape. An environmental values assessment has not been required for this development, despite the fact that it is nearly surrounded by landscape that has habitat for the Tasmanian devil, and the threatened wedge-tailed eagles, and that vegetation clearing will be required.

It is a small, narrow, unsealed road that services the lot. This development would seek to attract a large volume of tourists, according to the proponent's application. It would involve a substantial increase in traffic, including heavy vehicles during construction.

If it was completed and running, as proposed, the development claims to be accommodating nearly 40 guests a night, which would more than double the entire population of residents currently residing on the Fire Tower Road.

Again, this is questioned by the residents who have looked into the submission because no detail at all has been provided about the vineyard and the cellar door. There is no plan and there is no infrastructure that has been detailed for that ostensibly important part of the application. The validity of that, as the purpose for the proposal, has been questioned.

It is located in a rural resource area and that makes it inappropriate to have a polo field and inappropriate to have accommodation. However, because they are hanging off the only part of the development application which has any legs in the planning scheme in that rural resource zone,

which is the vineyard, these things are clustered around the vineyard as though they are part of the vineyard package.

What residents are making very clear is that there has been no capacity for them to comment about the things which really matter, including the water resource for the project. Koonya and the whole of the Tasman Peninsula is well understood to be a very dry place. The water source at the top of Mt Clark and Mt Koonya have a water lens which is a finite resource and it has plenty of users already calling on the finite capacity of that lens. There are particular issues looking to the future about water availability and whether and where such developments would source their water from. This is very important to residents who have to share that increasingly diminishing resource under climate heating.

This development is in train with the council, but it raises issues for residents in the area: the issues that we have spoken about in this place numbers of times; the flaws in the Tasmanian Planning Scheme that do not give the community a meaningful say about developments that are happening in their own areas; that do not allow for appeals to be taken in a way that is open to all people and at a cost that can be borne.

The cost of going to the Resource Management and Appeals Tribunal is very expensive, usually in the tens of thousands of dollars. So, it is important to have appeals which are available to everyone in the community so that decisions can be challenged if they are not based on correct and adequate information. Clearly, there appears to be some really huge questions for this development, and we will wait to hear what the council determines. We need to be able to understand the environmental impacts of projects like this.

Time expired.

The House adjourned at 10.03 p.m.