

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS

Matter of Public Interest

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [3.10 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Premier to provide an ironclad guarantee that the state border will be fully open to interstate and overseas visitors from 3 March 2022, subject to travellers complying with appropriate state and federal government entry approvals and health controls.

I would think that this is a motion that the government could easily agree to. Before I talk about this motion, I want to deal with some of the accusations that the Premier made during question time, particularly that the National and Liberal Parties are courting the anti-vaccination cohort in our state. That could not be further from the truth. I absolutely without question put on the record today that we have not sought to seek the support of the anti-vaccination group that exists in Western Australia and across the nation. We have been very supportive of what the government has been doing to drive up this state's vaccination rates. That includes promoting vaccination clinics, encouraging people to get vaccinated, and doing everything we can in our communities to ensure that people are taking responsibility for the health of not only themselves and their family, but also the community.

The Premier thinks it is okay to stand in this place and say that we should not be asking reasonable questions about the fact that rather than release information, he is keeping that information close to his chest so that nobody has any idea about what he is using to make decisions about the lives and livelihoods of the people of this state. It is entirely reasonable that we ask those questions.

I want to refer to documents that were uploaded onto the Parliament of Western Australia website at 2.30 pm today. I do not want to be cynical, but I know the Premier held a press conference earlier today and ducked and weaved to try to avoid answering whether information on the Omicron modelling and related documentation would be released today or tomorrow. That information was uploaded at 2.30 pm, after the start of question time. An email was included with that information. That email is very specific. It is dated Tuesday, 22 February 2022, at 10.45 am, and is from Andrew Robertson, the Chief Health Officer, to the Premier. The email is very specific about the announcement that was made on Friday about the removal of the proof-of-vaccination restrictions for bottle shops. I add that the email also refers to some of the questions that were raised by the opposition and the media over the weekend around the requirements for ongoing mandates and restrictions in pubs, bars and restaurants.

More work needs to be done on that particular piece of information that has been uploaded. I absolutely reject what the Premier said during question time—namely, that we are courting the anti-vaccination lobby. That could not be further from the truth. We have tried to support the government when reasonable restrictions have been put in place and health advice has been provided to support those decisions. We have asked questions about the modelling, the data and the information that the Premier is using to make those decisions. We have done that so that we can do our job as the opposition. That is why last year, we asked the question: when will a decision be made about the border reopening? That started last year. The Premier made the decision that the border would be reopened on 5 February. He told the community that is what would happen, and we started preparing our health system and encouraging people to get vaccinated, and businesses started to plan.

On 20 January, the Premier made the decision that the border reopening would be deferred. That was based on the fact that the Chief Health Officer had said that we need to increase the rate of third vaccinations, and also provide more opportunities for children to be vaccinated. He said also that we were watching the levels of infection in the eastern states. That is fine. The decision to delay the border reopening was announced on 20 January. However, there was then a void of information about the booster vaccination rate that this state was seeking to reach, the trigger that the state was hoping to achieve with the vaccination rate for children, and the magical rate in the eastern states that would allow us to put all those things together and come up with a new reopening date. That question was asked again and again. The Premier and the Minister for Health refused again and again to provide information and advice.

We were left in limbo. That is essentially where we were until Friday of last week. The Premier and the Minister for Health had refused to answer question after question in Parliament about those very matters. The Premier then announced last Friday that we finally had a date of 3 March that we could work towards. We say to this house today that that must be an ironclad guarantee. The Premier must provide certainty to the community and to families and businesses that are working towards the date of 3 March. We do not want another period of limbo. We do not want the challenges that we have been facing faced over the last few weeks while the Premier and his government

have failed to provide any information or indication about the data, the science and the modelling that they are using to make decisions that impact our lives and livelihoods.

Despite the claims from the government—I went through this last week—the opposition has supported many of the measures that have been put in place to manage COVID-19. We agreed to the passage of legislation at the height of the pandemic when there was serious panic in the community. We encouraged our constituents to get vaccinated and get their booster. We supported the mandates when they were accompanied by health advice. We did that along with the community. A pact and a level of trust had been built up between the government and the community over the past two years that if we all did that, we would be given a date when we could transition to living with COVID and reopen our border. We, along with the community, depended on the Premier adhering to the health advice. We expected honesty and transparency in those decisions. However, after the decision was made on 20 January, there was no transparency. There was simply a void of information. We do not deserve the hyperbole. We do not deserve the spin. When I say “we”, I do not mean just the opposition. We have thick skin. That is our job. I mean the people of Western Australia. We deserve facts. We do not deserve spin. I can tell members that the Premier’s performance on 20 January, on prime-time television, was the spin machine in full flight.

We saw that again today in question time. The Premier cannot get through a question time without making it all about him. It is a bitter pill for those in the community who have been working hard to try to continue to keep people employed, and to make plans for when our border will reopen, that on 20 January they were left in limbo. The reopening date was deferred, and in its place we had a complete void. We were given no details about the data that the government would be relying upon. The Minister for Health was asked whether she would consider using information or advice from somebody the government already knew. I think the gentleman’s name is Professor George Milne. He had previously provided modelling on the Delta strain. That was dismissed as being nothing more than advice from a mathematician. It would appear that it was good enough the first time around but not good enough this time.

The opposition pointed out that when the Chief Health Officer’s advice was provided before 20 January, it raised several questions. For the period between then and Friday last week, there was absolutely no answer on waning immunity, what would happen if the community was exposed to Omicron peaking at the same time as our flu season or what would happen to workforce recruitment if the border were closed indefinitely? We know that our hospitals are under pressure. We know that this government has had to consider that because it wasted time over the last two years—in fact, probably longer than that because of the challenges in resourcing staff for our hospitals well before the pandemic arrived in Western Australia. The Premier failed to answer any of those questions put by the media before Parliament returned, and then when Parliament returned last week, he failed to answer the questions put to him directly by the opposition. It is sneaky and secretive and it does nothing to build trust in a community that has been let down by this Premier since that day.

We do not wash away the fact that the Premier and his government built an enormous amount of trust in the community for its management of the pandemic over the first two years; that is not what we are talking about. Since 20 January, this government has reverted to that spin, secrecy and hyperbole and it smacks of almost *Yes Minister*. I think that the government spent all last week avoiding questions about when the border would reopen, when the modelling would be provided and what data would be used so that it could have its press conference on Friday and release all that information. The health minister actually talked about that health modelling in the press conference on Friday, but she still did not release the information. She gave us the Cliff’s notes of the Omicron modelling, but did not provide the detail or the data. It left us wondering over another weekend whether the government’s response on the restrictions that came in on Monday had been proportionate and reasonable and whether the borders will reopen on 3 March. That is the question. Will the Premier and the government support this motion and give the people of Western Australia that ironclad guarantee—so those in the tourism industry, those running businesses, those in regional Western Australia and our families can get on with planning to live with COVID? They have done the hard work. That is what we ask for today. The date is essential. It is a marker for the government to rebuild its relationship with the state, the nation and the rest of the world.

I have to say that there has been more than enough commentary in national and state media that goes to the rift between this government and business and the international sector, which was highlighted by the member for Roe and the shadow Minister for Education and Training, and the challenges we face from a reputational point of view. There is no shortage of those comments. Although I concede that it is not unusual for a Premier from Western Australia to be parochial about Western Australia, what we have seen over the last two years is a Premier who has deliberately antagonised other states and deliberately played on the fears of others —

Several members interjected.

Deputy Speaker; Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mark McGowan; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Ms Rita Saffioti

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Deliberately! Members opposite have made an art form of alienating and provoking anyone outside the state over the last two years, and it will come back to bite us. That delay to open borders on 5 February did damage to our reputation —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — off the back of being locked away. It was the straw that broke the camel's back and that is why the Premier cannot walk away from 3 March.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: This is why we need a concerted effort to re-engage with our interstate and international markets, and why some of the surplus this government has amassed needs to be directed into campaigns to prove that we are open for business and we will stay open for business. Our recruitment of health workers must be turbocharged because we will need every single worker we can get our hands on. Given that the peak in the eastern states is passing and their hospital workforce is likely to face a less challenging environment, good luck encouraging them to come over here and deal with the peak in Western Australia when we have told everyone that we have been closed for business for two years. We have alienated and created challenges for this government and it needs to address this posthaste.

Finally, the Premier should do away with the gimmick of staying in quarantine for seven days when he returns from over east. If there is a rule for the rest of Western Australia, there is a rule for the Premier. I cannot understand why the Premier insists on quarantining for seven days. It is a gimmick and it is grandstanding and it is not necessary! If it is necessary, it would be necessary for everyone to do the same—and that is why these rules are so confusing.

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We have had messages that have caused chaos and confusion—flip-flopping and changing rules. The government needs to get on and give an ironclad guarantee for us to return to transition to living with COVID, opening our borders and providing some certainty for the people of Western Australia. They deserve that. They have done the hard work. It is very simple, Premier: vote for the motion and provide that ironclad guarantee that 3 March is the date that we will reopen.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.25 pm]: Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker —

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Most of the time the member for Baldvis behaves responsibly in this place, but sometimes he undoes himself to appeal to the peanut gallery. In relation to appealing to the peanut gallery, when you are the Premier of Western Australia, you have a special responsibility to be honest.

Ms S. Winton interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: We can get smart alec comments from the member for Wanneroo—I do not expect anything better from her—but I expect the Premier of this state to be honest. The Premier knows that we have never given any support or sustenance to the anti-vaxxers. He knows that. He knows that to a person on this side that we have said that every person in Western Australia should get vaccinated. The Premier said today that we supported people attacking his family. What a disgrace! I and other members of this chamber have made it very clear that we find that behaviour abhorrent. Premier, that is below you! You should be a statesperson in this chamber and to the people of Western Australia. When you stoop to those levels, you stoop to the same level as other members of this chamber who may be stuck on the backbench for the rest of their careers. You are the Premier and you have a duty to be honest in this place. Our job is to challenge you, to question your decisions and to make sure that they are in the best interests of the people of Western Australia.

When the Premier announced the opening date on 18 February, there was scepticism across the whole community. This is why we have brought this motion before the house. I will read a little quote from an interviewee on the ABC. I am sure that the Premier and others saw the interview. When the interviewee was asked about the opening date, they said, “To be honest, it’s a case of I’ll believe it when I see it because, much like the 5 February reopening, I am still kind of sceptical. To be honest, it’ll be nice because I have family overseas, but I am not betting a whole lot on it.” That encapsulates the matter. This was a solicited comment but from a young person who was interviewed by the ABC. Why? It was because this Premier broke the trust of, and the social contract that he had with, the people of Western Australia when he reneged on the 5 February date that we supported. We said to the Premier that we

Deputy Speaker; Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mark McGowan; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Ms Rita Saffioti

supported him having that date. He broke the social contract with the people of Western Australia, and that is why his popularity is plunging. I know that the Premier is driven by the polls; that is very clear.

Let us go back to whether we can trust this Premier. On 23 November 2021, I asked the Premier a question in Parliament about vaccination rates and whether we would achieve the rates required. I said to the Premier then, and to others in response, that I would congratulate this government if it achieved the desired vaccination rates, and I have publicly —

A government member: You said we'd never make it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Member, that is untrue. Why do you come into this place and tell untruths?

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo, the mask still does not help. Order, member for Baldivis! Carry on, Leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Thank you very much.

Members have a duty to come into this place and to be honest—or at least make their best effort to be honest, but it is clearly very hard for some members opposite. As I say, I expect the Premier to have a standard that is above that of backbenchers who will spend their entire career there. After I asked the Premier that question, I asked a supplementary question —

Is there any risk that a requirement for a third vaccination dose will delay the border opening?

This is the Premier's response—in mocking tones, I might say —

I have explained this many times, and I ask the member to listen. We said that we would set a date in late January—early February. Once that date is set, that is the date, so that will be locked in. I have explained that to the member many, many times. It would be great if he listened in question time.

That is the Premier and his ironclad guarantee, back when he said it. Members wonder why people no longer believe the date and why we brought this motion to this chamber. That is why, because back then the Premier, in his ridiculing tone, said to me in this chamber that that was locked in. Clearly, it was not. I will not go through the Chief Health Officer's advice on 18 January, but anyone who reads that advice will see why we had to open on 5 February.

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo!

Dr D.J. HONEY: On 12 December 2021, in a media announcement on the 5 February opening date, Premier Mark McGowan said —

“This is a date that some in the community have been waiting to hear for a long time,” he said.

“Many have family abroad that they have been unable to see for nearly two years. I am sure this date will be a cause of relief and celebration.

...

“I am confident that this is the right time and the right way to take this important step.

During that press conference, the Premier dismissed any questions that were asked. Journalist Gary Adshead impressed the Premier and asked whether we will open on 5 February. The Premier replied, “Yes. As I have said repeatedly, the plan is to open on February 5.” Gary Adshead continued, “The plan is, but are you going to open on February 5?” The Premier said, “Well, I have answered your question once again.” Then on 20 January, we had the backflip by the Premier. On 20 January, the Premier said that the opening would be delayed to some unspecified date. Premier McGowan said —

“Unfortunately, the world changed in December; Omicron arrived,” ...

“Omicron is a whole new ball game.

“We can't just shut our eyes and hope that it is different.”

Importantly, he said —

“The aim is to get it [the third dose vaccination rate] up above at least 80 per cent, perhaps 90 per cent,” ...

That is what the Premier said when he made that decision to delay the border opening.

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What are the facts? The facts are that it appears this decision was not based on medical advice at all, but based on polling. We know that there was a change.org petition with 40 000 signatures. We know that this government polls every week. We know that it polls before it makes major decisions, because the polling goes wide and we get the questions. We then heard the government announcement a few days later about what it was going to do. We know at that stage that the poll, published in *The West Australian*, stated that 71 per cent of Western Australians agreed with keeping the border open.

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: What does the polling tell the minister now?

Let us test the facts of what the Premier said at that press conference. In fact, Omicron was first detected in South Africa on 24 November, not December. Two days later, on 26 November, the World Health Organization said that Omicron was a variant of concern. National cabinet met and discussed the characteristics of Omicron. It said that it was much more contagious, but likely less virulent, and we had our first cases in Australia on 9 December. In fact, when the date was set, the Premier already knew about Omicron, and the characteristics of Omicron were already known about in Australia.

On 18 February, we had the announcement of the reopening date of 3 March. Premier McGowan said —

... “the virus is already here and we cannot stop its spread”, with the state set to reach a peak of 10,000 new cases a day by the end of March.

...

“There comes a point where the border is redundant, because we’ll already have the growth of cases here ...

Remember that previously the Premier said that he would set that 3 March date when our third-dose vaccination rate reached 80 or 90 per cent. At the current pace, the prediction is that WA is on track to reach a third-dose rate of only 70 per cent by 3 March. It is not the 80 or 90 per cent hurdle that we were told was in the medical advice. It is what we have been told all along. I can tell members why. Members wonder why we are sometimes sceptical about medical advice. We are sceptical when medical advice arrives days after the Premier makes a statement and when the Premier tells us that he will not set that border opening date until the third-dose rate reaches 80 or 90 per cent, based on health advice. Somehow that magically changes in a relative handful of days and suddenly it is okay to reach a date when we are likely to reach a third-dose vaccination rate of only 70 per cent.

What is it based on? Is it based on health advice or is it based on more polling? We know from polling that the majority of Western Australians support opening the border. That is the simple fact. It has changed dramatically over a relatively short time. That is the fact. What is driving this new date? Is it a cheap political stunt? Is it that the polling has been done and the Premier is desperate not to be unpopular or have his popularity go even further while still at impressive heights? We all recognise it on our side. Is it a new poll that came out?

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The reality is that the Premier broke the social contract he had with the people of Western Australia. The people of Western Australia did everything that was asked of them. Western Australia has easily the most compliant population in the whole of Australia in supporting that, and has given overwhelming and strong support for what the Premier asked for, and the Premier broke that contract. That is why we want the Premier to make the commitment in this chamber that he will stick to that 3 March date. It is because many people in Western Australia are concerned that, should another poll come out or should some other factor occur that is not to do with the health of Western Australians, he will renege on that date as well.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [3.37 pm]: I also support the Leader of the Opposition’s motion asking the Premier to provide his ironclad guarantee that the border will reopen on 3 March. I remember on the night of 20 January, I was in a meeting with about eight other people, and they were in an absolute state of shock when that announcement came through. They could not believe that the Premier had backflipped on that announcement. To be honest, I think the Premier is feeling bad because all of last week and again today, as demonstrated by the Dorothy Dixier asked by the member for Wanneroo, he was once again trying to justify the decision. We have seen it. Every day since Parliament has started, the Premier has been trying to justify his decision and trying to make himself feel better because he has let the people of Western Australia down.

The international student sector is one area that I have to emphasise, because the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training met with the vice-chancellors upstairs in November last year. Everything was going to be great from the first semester of 2022: “We will give you our ironclad guarantee that it is going to happen.” Then

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we had the date set in December, with all the international students ready to go. On 20 January, the Premier let down not only the students, but also those universities. The damage from this decision will take years to get over. We will never know the financial and emotional cost. From talking to the vice-chancellors, we know about the worry they have about the mental health of their international students. Some of those students are now almost too frightened to book their next flight in case there is another backflip. The Minister for International Education announced the packages today, after the damage has been done, but I can honestly say that it will take years to get over the reputational damage to not only our international education sector, but also the business sector. Business leaders are moving east. It is easier for them to fly internationally than it is to fly back to WA.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I can absolutely guarantee the same thing will occur in the international education sector. Once they start leaving, they will not come back, and we will see that happen over the next couple of years. It will take many years for the sector to recover. It is the same as what happened after the Premier's regional migration scheme announcement; the damage that that did for two to three years was immeasurable.

I briefly want to mention sport. The Premier has said repeatedly that sport is not a priority. I can assure the Premier that sport is big business. So many teams have had the rug pulled out from under them. They are worried about another backflip, which is why we want an ironclad guarantee so that they can start planning again and working towards the season ahead.

Families from over east and overseas who were planning to come in on 5 February enrolled their children in primary and secondary schools. The government's backflip not only up-ended work opportunities, but also severely impeded some of those families' plans for the education of their children. I also want to mention how the community has set up its own Facebook page for health information and isolation rules with an updated spreadsheet on exposure sites. That Facebook page has 36 000 members because people are not getting the information from this government. The Premier said on television the other night, "Everything's going really well; we've had two great years". I can tell the Premier that while his salary arrives every week, it does not for those businesses.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.41 pm]: I have a few points to make in response. Firstly, I will explain to members opposite again why the date for the full reopening of the interstate border moved. The reason the date moved was the spread of Omicron and what it was doing to the eastern states. They had hospitalisation rates of around 5 000 people and hundreds of people in intensive care with Omicron. That had not occurred on 13 December when we announced the date. On 13 December, when I announced the date, that had not occurred. When I announced the date, I was very clear—I will explain to members opposite again like I explain it to the media every time they say it—when I said that the date was subject to there being an emergency or a catastrophe. That is what I said at the press conference. With what I said at the press conference and in the other communications I had with everyone across Western Australia, it was very clear that it was subject to an emergency or a catastrophe.

From 13 December up until 20 January, case numbers in the eastern states grew exponentially. They had tens of thousands—in fact, some states had up to 40 000 or so—cases a day, with mass hospitalisation rates, incredible lines at testing clinics, mass disruption, furloughing in the community, a huge number of people absent from work and large numbers of people dying—dying in Australia. That was something we had not seen since 1919. That was the circumstance we faced. On 20 January, we received advice that we should change position and that is what we did. We basically delayed, in effect, the border reopening for a month.

What has occurred in that month? We have had a huge increase in third-dose vaccinations—indeed, a massive increase in third-dose vaccinations. We had around 25 per cent or thereabouts on 20 January and we expect that rate to exceed 70 per cent by 3 March. Secondly, there has been a massive increase—at least a tripling at this point in time—of the vaccination rate of children because of our decision. Thirdly, the eastern states have come off the peak of infection. I will explain that to members opposite again. Between 20 January and 5 February, there was mass infection in the eastern states. Opening the borders when there was mass infection would have meant that the seeding event in Western Australia would have been far higher and larger, which would have been incredibly difficult and disruptive for us to manage and a larger number of people would have died. Those were the circumstances we faced.

Finally—I think this is a very relevant consideration—if we had just blithely opened the borders when we had virtually no cases here, we would have been deliberately infecting the people of our state. That would have been a conscious decision of the government. The South Australian and Tasmanian governments deliberately infected the people of their state with an illness that can be deadly. That is what they did. The South Australian government did that. The Tasmanian government did that. We decided not to do that. I did not want that on my conscience at the height of the pandemic in the east when we had low third-dose rates of vaccination because I did not want

to see Western Australians die in large numbers. I know that in some circles it now seems unfashionable to not want to see a large number of people die. It seems unfashionable to say that you want people to survive and that you do not want hundreds of people dying on your conscience. But I do not. That is why we took the decision that we took.

It was a catastrophe and an emergency. In my lifetime, I cannot remember anything like what was occurring in the eastern states. I cannot remember anything in my lifetime that compares with what was occurring in the eastern states in December and January. It was worse than what occurred in Victoria in 2020, which had us all terrified. The rates of COVID cases and the number of people in hospital dying across the eastern states were worse because the Omicron variant changed everything. We were not aware of the extent of what it would do on 13 December. I did not know that; no-one knew that. It only came into existence in what, late November. It was about two or three weeks old at that point. As the Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison, said “Omicron is a game changer.” It was completely different. He told us at national cabinet that Omicron was like a completely new virus; it was a completely different thing because of its transmissibility. It was not as severe but its transmissibility was extreme. That was the circumstance that we faced. As I have said on many occasions, faced with the same facts and the same information, and knowing of the mass campaign that would be run against me for making that decision, I would make exactly the same decision again because I actually want to save Western Australian lives. I want to save our hospitals. If we can avoid it, I do not want large numbers of people getting very, very sick and straining for breath. These are actually important things, and I find it extraordinary that some people blithely ignore them. In any event, that is the decision we took, for better or worse. It has meant that people’s travel plans have been disrupted by a little bit less than a month, but it has also meant that we have saved many lives and prevented a great many people from getting very, very ill.

Queensland opened its border in basically the same circumstance as we would have done on 5 February and since the start of this year, 470 people in that state have died. South Australia did the same thing and 168 people in that state have died since the start of this year. That is what occurred. They deliberately took the decision to open. We deliberately did not take that decision and I will be proud of that when I am out of this place. We did the right thing to save lives, particularly the lives of older people and immunocompromised people. I am proud of that decision because people are alive who would not otherwise be alive if not for the decision taken by the government of Western Australia. As I said, the South Australian and Tasmanian governments and other governments around Australia took a different decision and in those states a large number of people are now dead. That is my point of view. I actually value human life.

In relation to the opposition’s arguments, opposition members asked why we took these decisions. We tabled the advice today; it is on the website. The reasons why we settled on 3 March have been released for all to see. It is all there for members opposite to read. Members opposite say, “Where’s the evidence?”, but I have gone through this for two years. Members of the Liberal Party march in here and say, “Where’s the evidence? Where’s the advice?” We have tabled it before they say it, but they do not seem to notice it is sitting there. We release it to members opposite online and in Parliament, but even after we release it, they come in here and say, “Where’s the information?” It is a really strange phenomenon. Liza Harvey used to do it all the time. She used to march in here and say, “I want the evidence!” and we had given it to her in questions on notice, on the website and I had handed it to her from the table here, but she would come in and say, “Where’s the evidence?” It is a strange phenomenon that it is the most basic of things the Liberal Party and National Party members do not seem to understand. The advice is there. We have tabled it. It is there for the opposition to see why we landed on the date of 3 March for reopening the state. It is there. The modelling is there. The advice is there. As the advice points out, by 3 March there will not be much point to an interstate border anymore. We had a case come in on 2 January, from Tasmania, a couple of hours or maybe a day before we closed the border to Tasmania, from quarantine—I think it might have even been in a motor vehicle from the airport—and it spread to someone else. Omicron got into the community that way. Now it is out there and we have 250 or thereabouts cases reported in the community today. We cannot stop it. We have eliminated COVID five or six times now. I remember Gladys Berejiklian always saying that Delta was too hard to eliminate. I think we eliminated it twice, did we not? She was saying that it was impossible to eliminate, but Omicron is a different beast from Delta, as the Prime Minister said, so we could not eliminate it. It is already in the community. When we bring down the border, the border will basically be out of date because Omicron is already in the community.

I might remind all members that the border has stood us in good stead, as has the international border. The critics—the national press in particular, based in Sydney—do not seem to realise when they criticise borders that we have an international border. We have had one now for two years. They do not criticise that one. They only criticise the state ones. Had it not been for our border arrangement that kept out the virus, we would not have kept all our industries open and continued pumping massive amounts of revenue into the commonwealth, which the commonwealth then gave to New South Wales and Victoria. That is what occurred. What did New South Wales get in pandemic payments recently? It was \$8 billion or \$10 billion, or thereabouts, and Victoria somewhere a bit less than that, but something

like that. Where do members think that money comes from? It comes from states like this that stayed open when the other states were closed. That is where it came from.

We have tabled the advice. We have tabled the modelling. It is all there for members opposite to see how we landed on 3 March. In my view, the advice is there and the modelling is there, but it is pretty much common sense. Our vaccination rate will be over 70 per cent. Our children's vaccination rate will be at 65 per cent or thereabouts, from memory. We will already have widespread cases of COVID-19 in the community, so the border will no longer be effective. That is what the modelling and advice says, but that is common sense. I think most people on this side of the house can understand that. It is basic common sense.

On the opposition's arguments that somehow they have not done the things I referred to earlier, I will take members through a few of them. The anti-mandate protesters and the anti-proof-of-vaccination protesters are out there. They gathered down the road from my house the other day. They drove up and down in front of it, scowling, yelling and swearing, doing different things. They are the sorts of things that some of this crowd are doing. All I would say to members of the Liberal and National Parties, which were once great parties in this state, is that they should not dog whistle to them. I have a quote from Peter Collier from 15 February on the anti-COVID-19 vaccine protests at Parliament—Peter Collier, the most powerful man in the Liberal Party. Do members remember the big protest that was around the building last week? He said this, and I quote —

I can understand why people are frustrated. I can understand why people are disillusioned. I can understand, quite frankly, why some people are angry.

He said that to a media crew. What is that saying? It is not rejecting the protesters. It is sucking up to them. That is sucking up to them. That is what that is doing. When the Leader of the Liberal Party in this house says no-one has ever said anything to support them and no-one has ever given them any understanding or support, that is completely and utterly false. Mr Collier, the man who runs the Liberal Party, the head of "The Clan" who they are all frightened of, that is what he said. It was a cheap shot to the journalists to suck up to those people out there who are behaving in the way that they are.

On mandatory vaccinations, on 20 October 2021, after I announced the mandates, the Leader of the Opposition said, according to my notes —

Disappointing that it's come to this for the community and I have great concerns that it may also cause greater resistance in the community.

Our strong preference would be you would do absently everything to get people over the line in a voluntary capacity.

In other words, it is criticism of what we did. That is what that is. I will explain it to members again.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: When you do not have widespread —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr M. McGOWAN: I am speaking, thank you, and I did not interrupt you. When you do not have widespread coverage of the virus in your state, getting people vaccinated is hard. It is hard, which is why we did what we had to do. When the Leader of the Opposition says things like that, once again, as she did with the motion moved earlier in this house, she is undermining the efforts we are making to ensure that our mandatory vaccination program has bipartisan support. That is what she is doing.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Please; no-one listens to you. You are going to be the Leader of the Liberal Party for a couple more months. Just act with dignity.

Opposition members are saying they never said any of those things about the vaccination program. Members of the Liberal and National Parties are saying they never said it was never going to work. I quote the Leader of the Liberal Party on 9 October 2021 from his speech at the Liberal Party state conference —

There are no significant jurisdictions in the world that have achieved that level of vaccination and we know, given the appallingly low level of vaccination in Western Australia, that we will not achieve 90 per cent until sometime a long distance into next year, probably into the second part of next year.

We are now at around 98 per cent first dose, around 96 per cent second dose and we are approaching 70 per cent third dose by 3 March.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is what you said. We put in place these programs and all the Leader of the Liberal Party did, nonetheless, is say that to the Liberal Party state conference—I am sure they were so impressed.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Leader of the Liberal Party!

Mr M. McGOWAN: Hang on, you come in here and say that you backed us the whole way along; you have not. Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: You have not. Then we have —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: You have not.

Dr D.J. Honey: We have.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I just quoted to you. That is the thing about the Liberal and National Parties. I can quote directly what members opposite said and then they deny; they do not even deny they said it, they just deny it! It is an odd thing that they do. When I quote to them what they say, they just deny it and start verballing. It is a direct quote from the Leader of the Liberal Party's speech to the Liberal Party conference. At least someone listened.

I will then go to opposition members saying they would never have criticised the government on the borders, even though they have, at length. From 10 November 2021, I want to quote the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party —

We have stated consistently that if that date had to change, the WA community would overwhelmingly support it and it understood that that may be the case and it may have to change if the health advice required it.

The Deputy Premier, then Minister for Health, then said —

... the member for Vasse says, “Set a date, and if you need to change it, that is fine; we will not critique you or anything like that,” quite frankly, that is absolutely laughable. The member for Vasse must think that we just came down in the last shower of rain if she thinks we think that she is not going to criticise us every step of the way.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse, responded, “I wouldn't.” In other words, all we have copied is criticism ever since, even though members opposite said that they would not do that.

The Leader of the Opposition knows better. On 19 October 2021, she said —

It needs to put a date. People in Western Australia will understand if that date needs to be moved ...
...

I think the Premier needs to trust the people of Western Australia. We have been living with this situation and watching what has happened in other states; we understand that there will always be riders on these plans—these dates ... We understand the unpredictability of the disease we are facing, but the Premier need not fear that the public will not understand that the settings in any plan may be only indicative.

That is what she said, but then she attacks us every day because, in order to save lives, we moved the date. That is what she did and that is what she does. Honestly! It is unbelievable—the way she acts.

I will not even go near the support the opposition has provided to a certain gentleman in the High Court.

A member interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I will not because Liza Harvey is not here. When she was the Leader of the Liberal Party, she was out there supporting that challenge. She is not here, so I will not mention it. In light of the fact that she is not here, I will not mention that the Liberal Party was supportive of that. I will not mention what the Prime Minister, Christian Porter and everyone else had to say about those issues. But that is the truth of it.

On other issues, I remember that the member for Roe was out there saying that we would not be able to staff schools. We have—in the middle of a pandemic. He said that it would be terrible in schools. We have had the least amount of disruption or closures of any state in Australia over the course of this year. Queensland shut all its schools for two weeks. Nearly 2 000 schools were shut for two weeks. We had one public school close for one day—my God! That is what has occurred in Western Australia. The Liberal and National Parties have undermined us the entire way along. When I quote it to members, they deny it. That probably says something about them rather than about the quotes.

Deputy Speaker; Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mark McGowan; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Ms Rita Saffioti

Finally, as I said in question time, we guarantee that 3 March will be the opening date, but it is because we already have COVID in the community and we cannot get rid of it now and because we will have a high third-dose vaccination level, which will save many lives in Western Australia due to the conscious decision that this government took.

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [4.02 pm]: I rise to speak to the motion moved by the opposition. I want to start by addressing some of the claims made by the Leader of the Opposition in her contribution. She couched those claims as the opposition, not as an individual member in this place, so let us look at some of the claims that she made about how opposition members have conducted themselves in managing this pandemic. The first claim was that they have never courted the votes of the anti-vax movement and have supported the vaccine mandates when supported by the health advice. Let us look at the member for Vasse's tweet on 18 February. It states —

With nearly 99% of the eligible popn now vax, current mandates are becoming unnecessarily vindictive, inconsistent & costly for small biz. The McGowan Govt doesn't enforce mandates at Dumas House. Mandates should be fair & in step w Fed Health advice.

So she clearly has no regard for the state health advice.

The member for Vasse has also claimed that Michael Darby, a known anti-vaxxer and COVID conspiracist, is her hero. That is the kind of support that the Leader of the Opposition is linking herself with. That is her colleague she is joining with in managing this pandemic.

A member interjected.

Ms A. SANDERSON: They are the actual words that were said, member.

The next claim was that they had been encouraging people to go to vaccination clinics and get vaccinated. Again, in the last two months of 2021, the member for Vasse did not make a single attempt to encourage people to get vaccinated, despite the fact that we had announced the border opening. In January, there was one social media link to the government's Roll Up For WA website. On 24 January, she even wrote an op-ed, undermining our attempts to get people to take the virus seriously and claiming that it was just like the flu and that people die of the flu anyway. The thrust of her op-ed was that that is okay and that we should just let the virus in because people die anyway. In it, she says —

ABS data shows 1671 people died in Australia due to COVID between January 2020 and October 2021.

She also says that with the Omicron variant, the average age was 83 years and 71 per cent had pre-existing conditions. So that is all right then! That is fine; they can die! Older people who are over 70 years of age can die, and if someone has a pre-existing condition, that is just the cost of doing business, according to the opposition health spokesperson!

Mr P. Papalia: Shameful.

Ms A. SANDERSON: It is utterly shameful! We know that there were more deaths from COVID in the first 34 days of this year than there were in the entire preceding months of the pandemic.

The member for Vasse interjected on the Premier in question time when he said that the lives of hundreds of people have been saved by the decision to defer the date and she asked how many lives have been saved. How many does it take? I ask the Leader of the Opposition: how many lives is okay to sacrifice to COVID? The member obviously has in her head a number for the people it is okay to allow to die and that is why she has consistently undermined the things that have worked in keeping people safe. Those things are the vaccination mandates, the hard border and the public health social measures. They are all things that have kept us safe.

David Honey, the member for Cottesloe and Leader of the Liberal Party, said at the Liberal Party conference in 2021, which I think the Premier talked about, the following —

... we will not achieve 90 per cent until sometime a long distance into next year, probably into the second part of next year.

We have; we are at over 95 per cent, yet he had no faith that the community would do that.

The other claim made by the Leader of the Opposition was that it supported reasonable restrictions when there is health advice to support it. Hon Dr Steve Thomas referred in his media release this morning to public health social measures and said that the latest changes had continued a general theme of ignorance or contempt from the McGowan government towards business operations. David Honey, the member for Cottesloe, immediately claimed that he was sceptical of the health advice.

The next one was that there must be an ironclad guarantee. The Premier was very, very clear: barring a catastrophe or an emergency, that date would stick. In our view, thousands of people dying is a catastrophe and an emergency, and that is why I will move an amendment to the motion.

Amendment to Motion

Ms A. SANDERSON: I move —

That all words after the word “house” be deleted and the following be inserted —

acknowledges the Premier’s guarantee, as confirmed in question time today, that the state border will open to interstate and overseas visitors from 3 March 2022 and supports the delay to Western Australia’s full reopening that has enabled much higher vaccination rates to be achieved across the state, especially the rates of third doses

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [4.08 pm]: What we have seen again today is the Liberal and National Parties playing politics with the pandemic, which they have done constantly over the past two years. I do not know where the opposition was over Christmas time, when those scenes were unfolding over east and we saw the exponential growth of COVID in the community, the rush on hospitals and the significant number of deaths that occurred throughout those states. I do not know where opposition members were. Obviously, they were hibernating, because they were not aware of what happened over there.

There were some words that opposition members did not use today. They did not use the words “vulnerable people”. They did not talk about deaths or the elderly, because they have turned their backs on the vulnerable people of Western Australia. Everything that this government has done has been to make sure that we protect the entire community—the vulnerable, the elderly and people who need our help and support—and that is what we have done. Again, I do not know to whom the Leader of the Liberal Party was talking —

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I did not interject on you! You turned your back on the Western Australian community. The Leader of the Opposition said that our Premier is too Western Australian and that he supports Western Australia too much. She backed the eastern states commentators against the Premier of this state. Members of the Nationals WA, who have made their entire reason for being to create division between metropolitan and regional WA, are now criticising the Premier for being too Western Australian. We do not accept that criticism.

The member for Roe stood up and said, “Sport is big business.” I tell members: sport is about community, and I am proud that my kids got to play community sport for the last two years. I am proud that my kids got to go to school for the last two years, compared with everybody else in this nation. To turn your back and ignore that is an insult to Western Australia. Sport is not big business; sport is about making sure that our kids get to play. The Premier and the Minister for Health are doing everything possible to ensure that we limit the negative impact of COVID and deaths in our community. I am very proud. We can look all those people in the community in the eye, knowing that we have done everything possible to save their lives, to protect the economy and to make sure that Western Australians can go about their business. The idea that members opposite side with the anti-vaxxers and those who are threatening the lives of the Premier, his children and his wife is disgusting. It makes us sick.

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: That is what you are doing! You are appealing to those who are threatening the lives of the Premier, his kids and his wife, and that is disgusting.

Division

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (David Scaife) casting his vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (40)

Mr G. Baker	Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr S.A. Millman	Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Ms L.L. Baker	Mr M. Hughes	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms J.J. Shaw
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr W.J. Johnston	Ms L.A. Munday	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr H.T. Jones	Mrs L.M. O’Malley	Dr K. Stratton
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Ms A.E. Kent	Mr S.J. Price	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms C.M. Collins	Mr P. Lilburne	Mr D.T. Punch	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr M.J. Folkard	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms R. Saffioti	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms K.E. Giddens	Mr D.R. Michael	Ms A. Sanderson	Ms C.M. Rowe (<i>Teller</i>)

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 22 February 2022]

p488g-499a

Deputy Speaker; Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Mark McGowan; Amber-Jade Sanderson; Ms Rita Saffioti

Noes (5)

Ms M.J. Davies
Dr D.J. Honey

Mr R.S. Love
Ms L. Mettam

Mr P.J. Rundle (*Teller*)

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

Question put and passed.