

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS — TRANSITION PLAN

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [4.58 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the state government for its failure to deliver a clear WA safe transition plan, which has impacted vaccination rates and the rollout, and failed to provide clarity for families, communities and businesses.

Before I start, I want to reflect on what would have been a very difficult motion moved by the member for North West Central, whose home is in Carnarvon. He stood because he has been in that community and reflected the sentiments that have been expressed to him. The way that the Minister for Police responded in his contribution was less than necessary in some instances. He could have simply focused on what the member for North West Central was highlighting—that there will be ongoing issues in trying to deal with the outcome.

Mr P. Papalia: Get on with your own motion. He was pathetic and terrible.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Minister for Police, thank you once again for an insightful contribution; you always add such great value! I know that Hansard cannot pick up sarcasm, so please take it as read that that was said with great sarcasm. The member for North West Central did the right thing in congratulating the Western Australia Police Force, but the minister then spent half an hour telling everybody that the opposition was attacking the police when that could not have been further from the truth.

I turn to the motion that I have just moved about the state government's clear WA safe transition plan, or lack thereof, which has impacted our vaccination rate and rollout, and failed to provide clarity for families, communities and businesses. Last Friday, we were finally let in on the plan that the Premier has held so close to his chest and refused to release, despite many questions and the community calling for clarity about what would happen with Western Australia's border and our plan to safely reopen after seeing other states going down that path. We were finally let in on the secret. After weeks of questions from the opposition, the media and the community, it became obvious to everyone that the dribbling of information by the Premier via a press conference on a daily basis was not going to fly any longer. That is what we were subjected to for weeks and weeks. The Premier would call a press conference and then there would be a hint of a snippet of information that was clearly being worked on about what life would look like when the WA border was relaxed. Sometimes we would glean a bit of information from the Minister for Health, who spends just as much time doing press conferences. In fact, we learnt when the plan would be released at a press conference announcing extra hospital beds for our health system, which has reached crisis point. When asked last week for, I think, about the hundredth time when a plan would be released, on 3 November, before the plan was released, an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*—a number of quotes were printed across the media—stated —

Mr McGowan revealed a 'transition plan' would be released on Friday, which would include unreleased WA-specific outbreak modelling.

“This more than caters for what we expect will be the demand from COVID when it gets here sometime next year, we'll release our transition plan on Friday,” he said.

“Which will detail a lot of those matters and it's been carefully worked through, carefully calibrated for the West Australian context.”

The government has been working on the plan “for weeks” but when asked why he was waiting until Friday Mr McGowan said they were still putting the final touches on it.

That was more than the Premier had revealed in response to the questions we asked in this Parliament on numerous occasions. He did not see fit to provide information through the parliamentary process of questions without notice. He either did not have enough information to share at the time or was unwilling to share it. I think he has been dragged to this point. It is interesting that the Premier said that he had been working on the plan for weeks, because he did not reveal that prior to the press conference on the Wednesday before the plan was released.

For some time, the opposition has been asking questions in this Parliament about a plan, a date, vaccination targets and thresholds—any kind of information—to provide clarity about what we are working towards. Days in this house sometimes pass in a bit of a blur, so I will read out the questions that we have asked specifically about a plan. Prior to that, we asked about how we would manage quarantine and other things of that nature. We started asking specific questions about a plan on 19 October. I will read out the questions because the Premier and this government have characterised them as unreasonable. When members listen to them all in a row, they will absolutely be able to hear that our questions have been reasonable and that the government, if it had been doing that work, should have been able to answer them without the theatre and the confected rage that we see during question time from the Premier, who takes any criticism very poorly. My question on 19 October was —

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I refer to plans recently released by Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania outlining how they intend to safely reopen their state borders. When can we expect a road map for Western Australia for our post-COVID-19 future to be released by the government?

Also on that date I asked —

Has the Premier asked for or received advice from the Vaccine Commander, the Chief Health Officer or Department of Health officials on whether his failure to set a date for reopening as part of a plan is impacting our vaccination rates; and, if so, will the Premier table this advice?

I think that is fair. We had been trying to understand why we have such low vaccination rates. Certainly, a lack of a date and plan has, without doubt, impacted on a high vaccination rate being achieved. Another question I asked on 19 October reads —

I refer to comments by the state's Vaccine Commander on 6 October that he had been given a deadline of 31 December to reach the 80 per cent vaccination mark for our population.

- (1) Did the Premier's cabinet set this target for the Vaccine Commander?
- (2) What other targets have been set for the Vaccine Commander to meet, where are these targets published, and what happens if he is unable to meet these targets?

I would not have thought that that was an unreasonable question. Again on 19 October, I asked as a supplementary question —

What other targets have been set for the Vaccine Commander to meet, where are these targets published, and what happens if he is unable to meet the targets?

On 20 October, my question was —

I refer to the announcement that the Premier has just been outlining in relation to the government's mandatory COVID-19 policy for Western Australia's workforce.

... when can we expect to see a road map that outlines a time line for safely reopening our borders?

That same day I also asked —

... when can we expect to see a road map that outlines a time line for safely reopening our borders now that the government has brought in mandatory vaccination for a large percentage of our population with dates attached to that?

Again on 20 October, I asked —

In the absence of a road map for safely reopening our state, will the Premier release the health modelling that has been provided showing the impacts on our hospital system, any legal advice and any other metrics that he is using to make decisions to mandate vaccinations and for future plans to reopen our borders safely?

On 26 October, I asked —

I refer to the release today of South Australia's plan out of COVID-19, in addition to the plans that have been released by the New South Wales, Victorian, Queensland and Tasmanian governments. As the only state now without a plan for its post-COVID future, when can Western Australians expect to see the government's plan?

Also on 26 October, I asked —

Would it not be better to link all these announcements into a cohesive plan so that everyone in Western Australia understands what you are working towards and we can get people rolling up to get vaccinated, sooner rather than later?

In between the first and second question, there was a statement that we were getting additional information on a daily basis and, at that point, it seemed to the opposition that it would be easier to put the information that was being dribbled out by press conferences and media statements into a cohesive plan so that everyone could be on the same page, the government could start working towards the plan and we would know whether it was meeting those targets or failing to meet them. The absence of a plan would have allowed the government to avoid scrutiny if it was failing on that front. Certainly, the Premier has shown again and again that he does not like criticism. He did not want to be in the position of setting a date and having to shift it. I have said repeatedly that Western Australians understand that this is a somewhat fluid situation. Every other state had managed to put together a plan, but we were still lagging behind.

On 27 October, I asked —

I note the Premier's refusal to release a plan to safely reopen our borders.

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- (1) What percentage of Western Australians has the Chief Health Officer advised must be double vaccinated before the Premier can relax border restrictions?
- (2) How long after attaining the vaccination rates that are required will the borders be relaxed, and has the Chief Health Officer provided the Premier advice on this?

Also on 27 October, I asked —

Can I just clarify that the Premier has had no specific advice from the Chief Health Officer on the specific percentage of Western Australians who must be double vaccinated—a specific number—and how long after attaining that vaccination rate the borders will be relaxed?

The final two questions were on 28 October, when I asked —

Can the Premier confirm that the government is contemplating 1 February 2022 as the date for reopening our borders and whether restrictions like wearing masks and capacity limits for cafes, restaurants, arenas and stadiums will be part of the plan that Western Australians are all waiting to see?

In a supplementary question, I asked —

Will the state be safely reopening its border on 1 February 2022—yes or no?

I am not going to bother reading the answers that we received from the Premier or the Minister for Health—it was a mixture of questions to both—because they were non-answers, just like the non-answer we got to our question on whether we would have advice from the government around the downgrading of the risk category for New South Wales, despite the fact that there was data to demonstrate that it was safe to do so. The Premier was unable to answer that and I think dragged his heels again on that front. This government adheres to the principle espoused by the BBC’s *Yes, Minister*, which is that it is question time; it is not answer time. After two years, extraordinary patience from the Western Australian community and the uncertainty of those very early days in which everyone had to adapt to a new normal, people are looking to the government for answers on quarantine, assistance for businesses that have been impacted by border closures and the skill shortages that we have been dealing with, and what we have been getting in response to that list of questions plus a whole raft of others has been little more than rhetoric. We get the rhetoric that “We will crush and kill”, “We will keep you safe” and “We’re making the hard decisions.” At a time when every other state that has actually been dealing with COVID in its community has managed to put together a plan, behind the scenes, this government was either failing to do that work or the Premier had decided he would rather keep everyone in the dark and just share those little bits of information when it suited him.

What became very evident last week was that that pressure was mounting. I have no doubt it was mounting from within his own cabinet, caucus and party, but it was certainly mounting from the business community and members of the community who had been separated from their families and could see no light at the end of the tunnel. That is all people were asking for. Certainly, we never stood and said, “You must open the borders before Christmas.” That is what some people in the community are saying, but not once has the opposition said that. All we asked for, before the plan was released, was for a plan that gave us a date and references to vaccination rates so that everyone was on the same page. When we spoke about this in public, we carefully said that we want a plan that allows us to safely reopen. That is because the government has access to the Chief Health Officer and the Vaccine Commander, all the resources of the Department of Health and all the other things that need to be fed into developing a plan. I have regularly said that when the government has all those resources and when we have a situation whereby this government has such significant power because of its numbers in this Parliament, it is incumbent on it to be as open and transparent as possible with the community. Certainly, when the government is asked questions in this place that are reasonable, it should not deflect those questions. It should say, “We are working on it and we will give you a date” or “We will tell you when we are going to release that.” It should not simply dismiss the questions that come from the opposition, which is entitled to ask those questions on behalf of the community.

When we asked those questions, every other state had released a plan, and every one of those questions that we asked had been asked of me in the community by constituents or people with businesses or families looking to reunite with loved ones. I note that every time we asked a question—any of those questions—we were berated or accused of undermining the government’s efforts to get a vaccination plan rolled out. We were also accused of being anti-vaxxers. I do not think that is appropriate. I certainly do not think that it is reflective of the position that the opposition has taken. Even a cursory glance at the media and the statements that have been made publicly by myself as leader and by others in my party will show that we have been encouraging people in our communities to get out and get vaccinated. Certainly, from my perspective, when there have been COVID clinics in the community, we have shared that information and encouraged people to get vaccinated. I deal with misinformation, just the same as every other MP does, removing those comments on my social media that are clearly trying to undermine people’s efforts to overcome their hesitancy and are trying to point them to sources of false information. We are all managing that and we have a commitment to try to get as many people vaccinated as possible.

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I think we are being impeded because we do not have a date. We have to use every tool in the toolbox because we know that COVID is coming. That is why the opposition has stood and said that we support mandatory vaccination when there is health advice and legal advice to support that. That is why I get the same messages as no doubt every other MP does, government and opposition, on my Facebook, behind the scenes, in my direct messages and in my emails, pleading for us to argue against mandatory vaccination, and I politely respond and say, “This is necessary and I plead with you to make sure you go and do your homework, go and talk to your health professional, make sure you get out there, roll up your sleeve and get vaccinated.” It is important. I think every member of the opposition has done that to the best of their ability, but the government is the one that has the funds at its disposal and the ability to refresh public health messaging. It needs to make sure that it is doing the research and the work to get out there into every nook and cranny of our community, and it has had the luxury of time. The Premier talks about the luxury of time on a regular basis, making sure that we are crafting and responding to these challenges very carefully. I am not sure that we have used that luxury of time particularly well, because it now seems that we are on a very short run into trying to get a significant number of people across the line, and at that point the government should use every tool in the toolbox to try to get everyone vaccinated.

When we have asked for a plan, some of the Premier’s responses have suggested—wrongly, I point out—that we were looking for a cookie-cutter response and asking the government to pick up the plan from New South Wales, Victoria or South Australia. We certainly never said that. We said we wanted a plan that was crafted to suit the Western Australian circumstance. We wanted a plan for WA. We had no plan. We wanted a road map for the people of this state to endorse. We wanted the government to back itself in its strategy, because that is what a government does when it puts pen to paper and publishes things; it holds itself to account for what it puts out into the community and then it can hold others to account for helping it to reach those targets. We wanted the government to back itself and set a date, set out a plan and get on with the job, and that is the key. Without a plan, the government could not be held to account for any promises. It is about accountability and transparency, or at least it should be. In my view, the government has been anything but accountable or transparent when it comes to publishing its road map. I think the Premier was dragged kicking and screaming to publish this. Other states have been able to map out a plan even when they have been living with COVID-19 and dealing with those pressures.

We finally got to last Friday—the big reveal—and there was no date. Our state government could not put a date in the much anticipated plan. I have heard various different descriptions of this, such as “a plan for a plan”, because it really is lacking in detail. On 4 November, the Premier said that we have not rushed these things because we have the luxury of time that other states have not had, so we can do it properly in a well organised and well calibrated way. I have said it already: I do not think that this luxury of time that the Premier speaks of has been used well; in fact, I am positive it has not, because our vaccination rates are still stubbornly low and slow. Without a target or a plan with a date, they will remain stubbornly so. The Premier has outlined the reasons we need to get to a 90 per cent vaccination rate; we would have had a far greater chance of getting to that rate if we were using every tool in the toolbox. We should be seeing proactive education campaigns and community and public health messaging to target those cohorts that are lagging behind. I have to say that I do not think it is hitting the mark. Other states and jurisdictions have been through this before us. Are we taking those learnings and applying them? I refer to mandatory vaccination. When there is clear advice from the Chief Health Officer, we have supported the decision. The opposition has supported the decision, despite the Premier’s outrageous response to our question in question time today. That was quite the performance.

I think part of the plan needed to be very specific about what will happen to people who choose to be unvaccinated and those who are vaccinated. What will they be allowed to do when our borders are relaxed and the date is set? The Super Vax Weekend that was supposed to make such a big dent in our low vaccination rates last weekend can only be described as a fizzer. We saw several thousand fewer people turning up to be vaccinated than turned up the previous weekend.

Several members interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: It is time to use the carrot and the stick; we need a combination of both. The reason we want the date is that businesses and communities need to plan. We have been shut for two years, which has kept the state in an environment in which businesses, to a degree, have been able to operate in quite unusual circumstances compared with those in our other states. However, the Premier has made a point of making sure the nation and our international neighbours know that we are closed. That reputation of being closed by a Premier who will shut the door at any moment will need repairing. Long lead times are required for our tourism industry and for our businesses to ramp up their staff, which they cannot access until the borders are relaxed. They cannot even start to plan to recruit until we have a date. Rather than using this luxury of time to work with industry in different sectors, I understand we are now seeing a group of hastily convened roundtable discussions after the fact. I say “hastily convened” because that is the feedback we get from industry. What other work is being done to address the challenges that will no doubt emerge as we reopen?

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I am reluctant to go back to question time because, as I say, it was a pretty amazing performance from the Premier today. While we are doing the work to transition and safely reopen our borders, we want to know what strategies and planning is being done in case we do not reach that 100 per cent or very high vaccination rates in areas critical to our state. Our teaching workforce is one of them. What are we doing to make sure that teachers who are vaccinated will be in front of classrooms? Even a cursory look shows us that in other states, the challenge has been that they have lost teaching staff because of mandatory vaccinations. That is not something I support; I say that everyone should go out and get vaccinated. But the reality is that there will be losses because there will be teachers who choose not to remain in the workforce. That will be very disappointing, but the government needs to be able to plan for that. I do not think it is an unreasonable question. The Premier's response in question time was utterly deceitful because we support mandatory vaccination. It is a reasonable question to ask because the end of the school year is coming up and then a transition plan will come in, but we will get more information, according to the plan, through December when we hit the 80 per cent double-dose vaccination rate and a number of thresholds at which those mandatory vaccinations will come into play. The questions from the opposition were: What will happen if we do not reach those high vaccination rates? Is there a plan to make sure all our schools have teachers in front of them? They are not unreasonable questions. I do not know that the grandstanding and outlandish statements made during question time today were necessary. Certainly, from my perspective, we would be sticking our heads in the sand if we thought 100 per cent of our workforce will be vaccinated. That is why I assume the government has not asked for 100 per cent of the workforce to be vaccinated or be given an ultimatum to move on. The example I will use is the police because the Commissioner of Police has been able to give the direction for police to be vaccinated. I do not think the police force has reached 100 per cent, but I am happy to be corrected. I think it is unrealistic; we should push everyone as far as we can to get vaccinated, but we need to be realistic and say that there will be challenges. I hope the government has some understanding of the scope of how big that challenge will be as we get towards the start of the next school year. What are we doing to ensure that we can attract teachers into the state and retain them? The New South Wales state government has a 10-year strategy; it has set an aggressive target and it will be in the same market as WA. Presumably, other states will be in the same situation. We will be competing in a very tight market and I think that will be something of a challenge, one I hope that we are up to meeting. Again, as an opposition, if we did not ask, we would be asked: "Why aren't you putting this on the table as something that is critical to our state as we go forward post the borders being relaxed?"

The final couple of things I want to talk about are whether the government is doing some work on the public health messaging that is required to get our community COVID-19 fit. We saw a big push when COVID-19 first arrived in Australia. We certainly all knew how to wash our hands, sanitise and check in to places using the SafeWA app. We have lived relatively freely in Western Australia now for some time and that has been absolutely welcome. However, as a state we have become somewhat complacent in the way we check in when we go into supermarkets. We all see it: people walk straight past; they do not necessarily use the app. It has dropped off. Our social distancing and our use of hand sanitiser—those hygiene measures—will have to be wrapped into the whole message along with vaccination. I was talking to a health professional the other day who said, "Vaccination is absolutely the number one thing we need to focus on, but we need to also make sure that we remind people about all the other ways they can keep themselves safe if and when COVID arrives in our state." I hope that the Minister for Health and those in charge of this response are looking at ramping up and resourcing campaigns to make sure that we are ready to be COVID fit, the way I have described it. If the minister would like to respond to that by saying there is funding and campaigns are squared away to re-engage our communities on these important issues, that would be very welcome because I do not see any of that as part of the plan. We will certainly be pursuing that further.

I know all our MPs will have examples of how the lack of a plan has impacted on industries, businesses and communities and how setting a date will be very helpful and why this is something we have continued to pursue. These are comments passed to me from people who understand the government's desire to minimise harm in the community, but they have been left hanging with no date to work towards. Clearly, we asked a question today about the sporting event calendar over summer. The Tasmanian Premier has not wasted any time in getting a foot in the door because he could see an opportunity where we might not be open or a reliable state because there is no certainty attached to our plan, whereas Tasmania can put that forward. Without saying that it was a done deal, the minister said, "We're doing everything we can." I suspect that if there was a date and more clarity, we would not even be canvassing this situation. It is not just the cricket. It is summer in Western Australia and there are a number of festivals and big key events that I suspect will be pushed because artists will have to quarantine or they will not be able to do dates in other states to make it over here. They will not risk coming here if they are not sure whether they are allowed to come in without quarantine or are allowed in at all. Those things are important to our economy. The Premier has talked regularly about making sure that we have a normal Christmas and a normal summer. Those big key events have been impacted by the situation over the last two years, and people are looking for certainty.

I had the pleasure of going to the West Australian Ballet the other day, not to the actual ballet performance, but behind the scenes where they do all the hard work before we see them on stage. One of the discussions we had was that they obviously plan their schedules, sometimes a year or two in advance, as would many others. If they want

to bring in choreographers or artists and plan their schedule for the year ahead, their ability to do that planning any time before certainty is provided in December, which we are told is when we will be provided a date, will be limited. Again, that industry has done a marvellous job, I have to say, in the way it has coped with the restrictions. It is an amazing organisation. The arts community in particular has responded as well as it could, but they are things that could be planned for better if we had a date and we knew what we were working towards. It would be infinitely easier if there was that date to work on. Our members will touch on businesses and sectors that they know are hanging by a thread. There are businesses in the state that really have hung on, and what will an extra couple of weeks or months do if they do not have an endpoint? Will they go to talk to their bank? Will they wonder whether they should just close up or will they make it through? The earlier we can give people like that certainty, the better. That is part of the reason we have welcomed the plan, but we want a date to go with it and some detail. It is that serious in some cases.

It is very concerning that we may have intrastate borders again. There will be an impact on businesses, particularly in the Pilbara and Kimberley. The number one priority has to be vulnerable communities. I would not want anyone to suggest that we are not putting that as a priority, but, again, if the government is looking to try to up its vaccination rates using every tool in the toolbox, setting a date, creating some urgency and making sure businesses have certainty are imperative. The big announcement last Friday, after multiple questions and requests for information, which was not forthcoming until the Premier saw fit to release it, was a plan that was not a plan. Quite rightly, people were disappointed with that. I hope that we reach those very high vaccination rates. I will certainly do everything I can in my community to make sure that those who are hesitant and need support to make the decision are provided with it, because we need to make sure that everyone is safe. All the opposition has asked for again and again is a plan for Western Australia to safely reopen and to provide certainty for businesses and communities that require it so we are all on the same page. I do not think that is unreasonable. In this case the government has certainly fallen a little bit short on what it has been tasked with, with the luxury of time that no other state had.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [5.31 pm]: I rise to support the motion that this house condemns the state government for its failure to deliver a clear WA safe transition plan that has impacted vaccination rates and failed to provide clarity for families, communities and businesses. It is really clear that WA Labor does not have a clear time-bound transition plan for Western Australia out of the COVID lockdown. To follow on from the point that the Leader of the Opposition just made, it was very clear after the announcement made last week, and a number of people made this comment to me, that there was in fact no change from what the Premier had been saying in the weeks and months beforehand—that is, “I’ll do it in my own good time; I’ll do it when I think it’s right.”

There are two reasons for this. The first and most obvious one is that the plan is not time bound, and that is critically important. The government has set an enormously high COVID vaccination rate as the trigger, one that has been achieved in only two countries in the world. They had been through the COVID epidemic and vaccines were prioritised very early; in fact, they were receiving vaccines before Australian authorities had approved them. Only two small countries in the world have achieved a 90 per cent vaccination rate, and for good reason. Australia started late in the vaccination program. There were two reasons Australia started late. One is that it is an island nation that can restrict overseas travellers and it did that to great effect. I know we have had some dreadful results on the east coast, but by any measure Australia, by state or as a country, has been remarkably successful. I might say that there is a lot of boasting about Western Australia, but the Northern Territory, South Australia and even Queensland have done extremely well. New South Wales and Victoria in particular have had a bad outcome in an Australian context, but New South Wales relatively less so. It seems to have had a remarkable recovery from the Delta variant, much more so than Victoria. But Australia as a whole, because it could isolate, has had a very positive outcome from the start. The other thing is that the Australian government, prudently, did not wish to move into mass vaccination of the population with brand new vaccines, which typically would take years and years of trialling to prove that there were no unwanted side effects. Australia had the luxury of waiting and seeing what happened in other countries before it did that. Nevertheless, other countries were vaccinating much earlier, yet, only two countries in the world have achieved greater than 90 per cent double dosed and they are not major countries, so it is a challenge. I know I speak for every member on this side when I say that if that is achieved before Christmas—fantastic, great. No-one will be more glowing in their praise of that achievement than me. As the minister and members on the other side would know, I do not hesitate to give praise to the other side. Equally, I do not hesitate to criticise when I see it is needed. That is our role; we are the opposition. I would certainly say that was a fantastic outcome. I am extremely concerned, given the hurdles that the Premier put up, not just that the state achieves an 80 or 90 per cent vaccination rate, but that it is achieved across the state. The government has set us up with, one, an indeterminate date, and, two, a date that is a long way in the future. I hope that is not true. I hope it is achieved much more quickly, but I am concerned for a few reasons that that will not be the case.

Public health is a key priority in all of this when these decisions are being made. I know these are serious decisions. I know the Minister for Health is a decent person and is concerned about Western Australians. He has to weigh matters along with the advisers, the Chief Health Officer and others. Public health is an important matter, but it should not preclude the state government providing a clear time-bound plan. We have a couple of reasons for wanting

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certainty. One reason is that it is a fair thing to do for people who are separated. It is a fair thing to do for businesses, which critically need to know when they can plan to move people between states. Another reason is that, by itself, it provides a motivation for people to get vaccinated. I will go through that in a little bit of detail in my contribution to this debate.

I will focus on the impact on business, as outlined by the Leader of the Opposition. In itself, the plan has an inconsistency in that it contradicts itself. The Premier has said he will set a date for the state to open at 80 per cent. If that is the case and he is going to set a date, why have the 90 per cent figure in there at all? If the government is going to set a date for when the state is going to open at 80 per cent, then set a date. Instead, the government has this two-stage approach of saying, “We’ll set a date at 80 per cent, but, hey, we have got to get to 90 per cent, which, as I have said, is an ambitious target.” The 90 per cent number may be the basis for modelling but it is not an excuse for not setting a date.

If we look at vaccination rates, there is something quite interesting. I will boast about vaccination rates in Cottesloe. According to the state government’s own data, greater than 95 per cent of the population have received their first dose and over the whole area 90.1 per cent of the population is double dosed. Perhaps I cannot claim all the credit, minister, but let us put it this way: people are happy enough to sheet home blame to me!

Mr R.H. Cook: It means they want to take advantage of the international borders opening in order to escape your electorate!

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is very unkind, minister. I was trying to be conciliatory and nice, but that was clearly not well received. I am sure there are many reasons for that.

If we go to another area where leadership is required, like Rockingham, only 78.5 per cent of people have received their first dose and only 62.5 per cent have received their second dose. It is interesting when we look across the state because we can see that the city and larger regional centres do better. In Albany, 83.6 per cent have received their first dose and 68.5 per cent have had their second. Albany looks like it is on track. Bunbury is very similar, with 86.3 per cent having had their first dose and 70.9 per cent having had their second. We see those high rates in the city and the large regional towns. It might interest members to know about my home town of Cranbrook. We still have a family farm there, so I am claiming the halo effect. In Cranbrook, 81.3 per cent have received their first dose and 62.9 per cent have had their second, which is better than Rockingham. I will not go through the figures exhaustively, but members can look at the smaller communities across the state, such as Boddington and Cuballing.

Ms L. Mettam: Busselton.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will look at Busselton quickly. In Busselton, 86.2 per cent have received their first dose and 71.3 per cent have received their second. Well done, member. Good leadership.

Of the smaller towns, Collie has achieved a rate of 78.58 per cent for the first dose and 58.1 per cent for the second dose. Typically, the vaccination rates in the regional areas are much lower because the challenge is greater and the vaccine is not as readily accessible. As I said, I will not go through this list exhaustively, but in the north of the state, the vaccination rates are even lower. There is a concern that setting the rate so high will be an enormous challenge in some areas. In suburbs with high levels of tertiary education and the like, we typically see that most health outcomes are better because of the good fortune people have because of their education background. It is disturbing to see those areas that have very low vaccination rates, which contextualises the challenge. My concern is that we will have a burst of vaccinations and there will be some recovery, but in the absence of people recognising that there is a real threat, we may not see those rates increase. This goes to the issue of how the vaccination numbers are determined. It seems as though this has been set up to give the Premier a say whenever he feels like it and gets in the mood and says that he thinks it is okay. One respected commentator suggested that perhaps the Premier had a view to the federal election and was making sure that he was the pre-eminent political figure in the state in the lead-up to the election and that once the federal election was over —

Mr P. Papalia: Who said such a stupid thing?

Dr D.J. HONEY: The minister can take it up with the commentator if he wishes to, but I will not waste my time engaging in a long and involved discussion with the minister over it. It is increasingly apparent that the political aspects are coming into the decision-making process, as opposed to what is in the overall best interests of the state.

I will go through some of the factors that I think are important and are affected by not having the clarity of a time-bound plan. At the outset, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, I have made it very clear that I hope everyone gets vaccinated. I have done that. On 9 May, I went to Halls Creek with Hon Neil Thomson and we had our first vaccination injection at one of the local Aboriginal clinics. The clinic used that as an opportunity to put it on social media to say that people and politicians are prepared to get vaccinated so why do the locals not get vaccinated too? Even though it was not the most flattering shot of me sitting in my singlet, I was happy for that to be used to encourage members of the public to do it. I know that the government seems to be fixated with some of my social media. I am sure they are all following my podcast, WA This Week. I encourage members to subscribe to it. Members will note

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from my podcast that I am very clear about the importance of getting vaccinated and that I fully support it, and I outline in some detail why I do that. It is not just about ourselves, but about everyone else in the community we can protect, especially the most vulnerable. I have made that very clear.

However, some people in the community do not want to get vaccinated; they just do not. It is a really unfortunate trend in public debate that those people are vilified. If there is one thing that I have learnt as I have got older, and that has been reinforced to me, particularly in my role as a member of Parliament, it is to not be critical of people who may have come to a different conclusion from me and perhaps to try to understand why they have reached that particular view. I know a dental surgeon who is closing his practice. He does not believe that he has to get vaccinated. Clearly, he is an intelligent person with a very successful business, but he does not believe he should get vaccinated. All sorts of motives are ascribed to those people, or it is said that they have an intrinsic mental failing if they do not. That is not my choice and I encourage them to get vaccinated. I hope they do, because it would be good for them and the rest of the community, but I understand that some people are enormously apprehensive. Members in this place who care about other people know that some people are enormously apprehensive about vaccination and have developed a phobia. Members can sit there and criticise that, but the truth is that it is very real for them, and so they will not do it. Although I encourage them to do it, I will not publicly vilify them. I do not think we should sit by and watch them being publicly vilified either. There is an unfortunate public approach to vilifying those people. We need to encourage and understand them. There are people who do not want to do it.

Another thing is that there are people who are waiting to get vaccinated because they do not see an imminent threat. They are not anti-vaxxers or apprehensive about it. They are okay with getting vaccinated, but they do not see any point in doing it when there is no imminent date to be vaccinated by. That is the problem with not setting a date. We do not have the immediate, existential threat that New South Wales and Victoria had of a large number of people getting ill and dying. We understand that. Equally, those people do not see any other reason to do it because, as far as they are concerned, life is just fine and they do not have to do it. I do not think there is any doubt whatsoever that if there were the reality of a date that they had to be vaccinated by, a significant number of people who are not yet vaccinated would go and do it. I have spoken to people like that. They are not against vaccinations and they think they will get vaccinated, but they just do not see any point in doing it now. Some of them do not like the compulsion aspect of it, but they will do it when they have to and when there is a realistic, existential threat. It is a small cohort, but there are a number of small cohorts, who do not see any reason for doing it. That will keep the vaccination rate down.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: The risk of having an open-ended deadline with no clarity is that the rise in vaccinations will trail off, we will not hit the trigger levels and the state will be left in limbo. That is why I believe it is important for the government to have a sensible, thought-out plan. Every other state has set a date, and I believe that they have done it for that reason in particular. A small cohort does not ever want the borders opened. It is not an insubstantial cohort. I have spoken to a number of people who are fine with it. They like the Western Australian border being closed. We have seen the Western Australia Party jump on the bandwagon and pretty well pursue a secessionist line on this. It has been saying, "Let's keep the borders closed forever", in an attempt to get its supporter numbers up. So there are people who do not ever want the borders to be opened. I think that part of their motivation for not getting vaccinated is that they do not want to hit the targets because that will lead to the borders being opened. I appreciate that that is a small number, but, again, it is a group that is there. As I have said before—I have said it here as well as privately and publicly—I urge everyone to get vaccinated. That being said, I equally believe it is important that the government set a realistic date, and a firm date, for when it will open the borders. The failure to set a definitive opening date is, in part, unfortunately fuelling the delay in some people getting vaccinated.

The lack of cut through of the government's vaccination message was exemplified on the Super Vax Weekend. There was advertising and effort for the Super Vax Weekend, but in fact the vaccination rate on that weekend was lower than for the previous two weekends. I heard the government's explanation for this—that as more people get vaccinated, there are fewer to still get vaccinated. But there is still a very large number of people who need to be vaccinated and that was not the reason. I am not criticising the government for having a go at that. Good on it. It is good to get out there and encourage people to get vaccinated and try different strategies, but the government needs to try harder. Clearly, that effort was not well targeted. The government should go back to the marketing people—the people who are experts in this sort of area—to see how that could be done better.

There is a significant potential impact on children in this transition plan. The Premier has made the hurdle harder by including the 12-plus age group of children in the 90 per cent vaccination target. The Premier says the reason that was done is that he cares about children. I am sure the Premier does. The Premier has a young family. I am sure he cares about children, but it begs the question of why it was set at 12. We know that the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation is actively considering the five-plus age group, which is happening in some countries. Does the government not care about the children aged between five and 11? Why was the target not set there? It begs the question of why this particular target has been decided and how it was decided.

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The Premier needs to be able to reassure the community. I understand that. One way the Premier could reassure the community would be by making sure that our schools are well prepared for a COVID outbreak. What we have not heard from this government is any detail whatsoever about the preparation of our schools for when the borders open. There is no doubt whatsoever that we especially want to keep children safe. We know that the management of hygiene issues in schools and with young children is much harder than in adult communities; thus, the potential for a COVID outbreak in a school is real. When children under 12 are not vaccinated, we know they can catch COVID. There is certainly a lot of evidence coming out now that even when people catch COVID and do not have any dramatic symptoms—it appears that young children typically do not get dramatic symptoms—they can have so-called long-COVID effects, which have been observed overseas where the COVID outbreak has been greater and longer.

We hear nothing from the government. Part of the preparation for opening the state, and to open it earlier, is to make sure that we are prepared. I am sure the shadow Minister for Health will talk fully about the preparation of the health system, so I will not go into detail on that, but I am very keen to understand what the government is doing to prepare our schools. We know that the ventilation of schools is being assessed in other areas. We know that the greatest spread of COVID is through the air. What is being done to assess the ventilation in schools? The ventilation of schools has been assessed in other states of Australia and other parts of the world. Where ventilation is inadequate, they have tried to improve it. Also, schools are installing high efficiency particulate air filters. There are two sorts of HEPA filters. Some are already in existing air-conditioning systems. HEPA filters remove micron-sized aerosol particles that carry and spread COVID. Portable HEPA filters can also be installed within classrooms to constantly filter the air and lower the load of aerosol particles. These are typically spit particles—bodily fluids, if you like, although that sounds a bit grim—that circulate and spread the virus.

Has the government done anything about that? Has the government actually done the work to assess whether there is adequate clean airflow—laminar flow—through classrooms so that any of those sorts of particles are removed? Has it bought HEPA filters? Is it installing HEPA filters in schools that need them? Does it have portable HEPA filters? That is part of preparing for COVID. I desperately and genuinely hope that the government is doing that, but I have heard nothing whatsoever. I hope that the Minister for Education and Training is on top of this and is making sure that all schools are fully assessed and then fully prepared for an outbreak. If the preparation of our hospital system is any guide, I am not optimistic, but I am interested in the minister's response to that because if it is not being done, it needs to be done as an urgent priority. That is not a simple thing. It cannot be done in one or two days or a couple of weeks; it is something that will take months for our many hundreds of schools. Procuring and installing HEPA filters, whether they be freestanding or within air-conditioning systems, or upgrading air-conditioning systems will take many months, especially in light of the enormous skills shortage in this state. That is something that has to be done.

When a reasonable question was asked today on this matter, we heard an attempt to slur this side of the house in terms of its response to COVID. In all workforces, a percentage of people are not going to get vaccinated. It is somewhere between two and five per cent. I have seen this at every level. I have not heard the latest numbers, but I think around five per cent of the Western Australia Police Force still has not been double vaccinated; it is something in that range. It is a significant number of people when we are talking about a workforce of 8 000 people. I know from direct contact that has been made with my office that a significant number of people in the health system do not want to get vaccinated and have said that they will leave their job. Again, we are talking about a two to five per cent barrier. Worryingly, in terms of hospitals, it is often older people who have those concerns—the more experienced staff. It is not all of them. I am saying that of the cohort who do not want to get vaccinated, the older ones are saying that they would rather leave their job than be forced to be vaccinated. As I said, I am not saying this to support that or to say that people should not get vaccinated—again, I am very clear that everyone should get vaccinated—but the reality, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition pointed out before, is that a percentage of that population will not do it and they will leave their jobs. We are talking about a significant number of people. The health workforce has many thousands of people, so two to five per cent of them is an enormous number of people. That is a challenge.

This is something that is going to affect schools. In particular, school classrooms are significantly being sustained, in terms of teacher support, by relief teachers. Those relief teachers are typically older teachers. Of that cohort, those who do not want to get vaccinated are saying that they will just give up being a relief teacher or they will leave a permanent teaching position. What modelling has been done by the government on those numbers? We hear from a number of sources that it is anywhere between two and five per cent. What work has been done to make sure that they are replaced? Let us say it is a higher number. If we lost five per cent of our medical professionals or five per cent of our teachers tomorrow, that would cause chaos in the hospitals and schools. Again, this is not to encourage people to do it; it is asking if that occurs—we know it will occur to some extent—what contingency plans does the government have? How is it preparing? We do not hear anything about any of these plans.

In the last couple of minutes I have left, I will touch on skilled workers. I attended the AusIMM Iron Ore Conference 2021 at the Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday. I talked to a lot of really outstanding

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manufacturers. I was impressed and surprised at the extent of some of the heavy manufacturing that is being done in Western Australia, particularly in the metropolitan area. When I spoke to those people, they all said how much the lack of skilled workers was constraining their businesses. Not only are they losing workers because of people who do not want to be vaccinated, but they cannot get critical key workers in this state. The government talks about projects that will drive this state forward. It talks about construction in this state. We know that the construction industry cannot get the workers it needs to fulfil its contract books. We know that these manufacturing businesses are being constrained and they cannot expand and take on any more work because they do not have people. That critically depends on the borders being opened and safely bringing in those workers they need. We hear that upwards of 50 000 workers are required for the state. It was interesting to talk to those businesses and hear about those real problems.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [6.02 pm]: I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, which states —

That this house condemns the state government for its failure to deliver a clear WA safe transition plan, which has impacted vaccination rates and the rollout, and failed to provide clarity for families, communities and businesses.

Much has been said about the government's plan—the decision that there will be a date for opening after we reach a vaccination rate of 80 per cent. I will touch on some concerns that have been flagged already, such as issues around health preparedness. I would also like to take the opportunity to speak about some of the concerns that have been raised at a local level in my electorate, specifically in relation to support for small businesses. It is something I do not get much of an opportunity to raise in this place, given the health crisis that we see across the state. It is clear that there is a lot of frustration. The opposition supports the take-up of vaccination rates, but there is a level of complacency in the community. There is a level of hesitancy as well.

It was hoped that the plan that was outlined by the Premier last week, with the support of the Minister for Health, would provide clearer guidance in what that means, and also encouragement for opening up, and that would be by setting a date. 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. However, it is important that there is clarity for the WA community. We are the only state that does not have a clear plan. It would have been a great incentive as well.

Last time I checked, WA was at about 68 per cent of over-16s double dosed. A couple of days ago at least, we were at 64 per cent double dosed for those in the over-12 age bracket, which compares with an 80 per cent average nationally. That is still well below where we should be. I appreciate there has been a level of complacency because this state has enjoyed the benefit of having very little COVID-19 in the community. However, we also believe that the government needs to ramp up the communications message. I understand that has been backed up by many quarters across the health space, selling that message about the importance of vaccinating for not just one's own health, but also the health of the vulnerable and their families and the older citizens who may be immunocompromised—basically vaccinating for your loved ones. I constantly hear from people who have issues around hesitancy. My office often directs people to websites to provide that important information about the safety of vaccines. I appreciate that we all have a responsibility to share that information, but there is an opportunity to invest in that further.

Much has been talked about the Super Vax Weekend. I understand that there were 100 fewer people vaccinated compared with the week before, or 3 000 in the last week of October. Of the 76 000 Indigenous people in WA, fewer than 20 000 members of the Indigenous community are fully vaxxed. The vaccination rates in some of the regional communities are particularly concerning. I note that the vaccination rate in the West Pilbara region is at just 29.7 per cent—a very concerning figure.

I have touched on the health preparedness. There are many questions from this side of the house about that. There are real concerns about the government's eleventh-hour commitment for additional beds and staffing and support for our health system. We certainly welcome the additional \$400 million investment that was made by the McGowan government last Wednesday, but it raises the question about why this investment was made so late—21 months after the Minister for Health had promised to ensure that our hospital system would be battle-ready. It has happened long after we learnt that we had the lowest number of ICU beds in the country per capita. It was months after we learnt through the publication of the most recent report from an Australian–New Zealand body in the *Medical Journal of Australia* that the number of ICU beds had declined as of 12 months before, smacking of a government that has been asleep at the wheel for hospital and health preparedness.

We do welcome the investment in intensive care unit beds. An additional 10 ICU beds will be provided for Fiona Stanley Hospital, but the concern is that we are seeing the pressure now, some 21 months after the Minister for Health promised this state would be battle-ready. I asked a question in this place today about the bed state black that the opposition was informed of, indicating capacity issues at Fiona Stanley Hospital. I have been advised by

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health workers that, as of 10 o'clock last night, they were unable to accept any additional ICU patients. We were further informed today that three cases of cardiothoracic surgery had to be cancelled this week due to a lack of capacity in the ICU, which is very concerning. We also know that ambulance ramping has been a significant stain on this government's performance in health, particularly given that the Labor Party promised to address this issue on coming to government. It has increased by about 300 per cent year on year since this government has come to office. It raises a question about the preparedness of our health system and how safe our health and hospital systems are with the plan to open.

It also raises a question about the level of support we will see for our small businesses, which is what I want to touch on in this motion. Underlying the importance of a safe transition plan, the concerns we are hearing from small businesses are about the importance of having a clear date, which will address some levels of complacency we are seeing in people in the community. I am also hearing from my small businesses that they are suffering under significant stress and pressure. We know that small businesses, together with industry, have done much of the heavy lifting over the last 21 months. The closure of the international border since 2020 and the reduction in the number of incoming passengers to just 265 a week have had an enormous impact. Interstate border closures have changed and the movement of people has been hindered by the spontaneous changes made to the state's risk level. This has been understood by small businesses but they are really hurting now. They are certainly seeking real answers to address the skills shortages that we are seeing across the state and the region.

No-one is more frustrated than Neil McLeod, from McLeod Tours in Margaret River. He is a big supporter of vaccinations, like the opposition. We support the safe opening of the Western Australian border, but he also believes that some clarity is required, as well as support for small businesses. He states —

We had a very successful tour business until Covid-19 closed us all down and if it wasn't for Job Keeper we probably wouldn't be in business today. We managed to get through 2020 with many of the bookings that had cancelled in 2020 because of border closures rebooked for 2021 so we had great hope and expectation that we would be able to recover our losses. However due to the ongoing border closures with the Eastern States since late June this year we have struggled financially and now it is becoming critical ...

Since the last lockdown in June, followed by border closures with the Eastern States we have had \$566,577 in cancelled tour bookings up until today due to border closures with another \$200,000 worth of tour bookings that will be cancelled if borders are kept closed till after Christmas as announced by the Premier.

He further states that he is seeking some clarity. His business is seeking some support for a safe transition but he is certainly also feeling the pinch.

We know that hospitality businesses across the regions have been hit hard. They cannot service the demand and many are restricting their hours and shutting the doors. Troy Bottegal of Peko Peko has been forced to incorporate restricted opening hours due to reduced staffing levels, which has resulted in a marked drop in revenue. Pre-COVID, Peko Peko was open seven days a week. It is now closed on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The current situation of 15 staff working long hours is causing fatigue and certainly a range of issues associated with morale. We know that local restaurants, such as Blue Manna Bistro, are now restricting hours and Wills Domain is restricting the days it is opening. Other businesses that have restricted their opening hours include Dunsborough Tavern and even the Dome in Dunsborough now closes at 3.00 pm. Other businesses are shutting their doors. Little Fish is closed, sadly, because of the frustration at not being able to attain staff. In addition, Burger Bones was initially closed during the school holidays and will now be unable to keep up with demand because of the limited numbers of staff it has. I quote the owner of Burger Bones, who states, according to my notes —

“Our chef, who we loved, had an opportunity to go up north and earn big bucks, so when we lost him we put out a call, ads and nothing.

“Everybody I know in the industry is facing the same problem, we are not a one-off, everybody is in the same boat.

“It is devastating because we have people message us saying, 'we are coming down from Perth and we have you on our radar'.

The risk to businesses is growing daily. Troy Bottegal of Peko Peko responded to a statement that was released by the government today about what was called a new campaign to help address hospitality worker shortages in Busselton–Margaret River. It reads —

... ‘ctrl your summer job’ campaign, geared at encouraging South-West teenagers aged 14 to 17 years to take up summer jobs in the Busselton–Margaret River region over the upcoming holidays.

The comment from business owner, Troy Bottegal, was, according to my notes —

“This is glib, band-aid management, an absolute joke ...

“This is a bona fide hospitality sector that needs skills—chefs, managers, counter staff. Students are not effective in the first 3 months because they need training.

“We need actual solutions from this government not marketing campaigns ...

He said that they are desperate and he talked about potentially closing or restricting his hours even further.

I have also received some comments from Aaron Carr, who has a business in Dunsborough, that I want to include. He has also spoken about the frustration that he feels from not seeing a level of support for workers. I will be wrapping up shortly because I appreciate that a number of members on the other side want to talk. There has been feedback from Aaron Carr of Yarri Restaurant and Bar, who has raised concerns about this. He said —

Our business has been forced to incorporate restricted opening hours due to reduced staffing levels and this has resulted in a marked drop in revenue.

We currently employ 24 staff and the additional pressure of being understaffed is causing fatigue and morale issues.

Personally, I worked an 18 hour shift last week due to ... shortages. This is not only affecting my personal life and health but also my family life ... The flow on effects are pressure on ... relationships and missing out on valuable family time.

It is also having an ongoing impact on the future of his business. It is clear that the stresses and strains of the skill shortage is endemic across the industry. A safe transition to opening the borders will provide much greater certainty for these projects. If we cannot get those opportunities in the near term, long-term value is at risk. That is absolutely what it is about. It is not about small businesses losing some revenue now; it is the fact that what we are seeing and what I am hearing about at a local level is happening because there is not a clear transition plan. Because there is still an absence and a lack of support for small businesses, we are seeing business closures right across the board. There is support for the uptake of vaccinations, but the level of complacency out in the community is concerning. We know that small businesses have overwhelmingly done the heavy lifting when it comes to responding to the measures that have been put in place by the McGowan Labor government. I have touched on the issues around the clarity of this plan and health preparedness. I also rose to urge the McGowan government, as part of the measures going forward, to provide additional support to ensure that our small businesses also have an answer to the skills and people crisis that they are facing. At a local level, as the member for Vasse representing a region in which businesses are closing, the real concern is that when they do close, like Little Fish and others, it will be more difficult for them to reopen.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [6.22 pm]: I thank members for their contributions today, but the one comment that has stuck in my mind is the great offence and distress expressed by the Leader of the Opposition about the way in which the Premier, in particular, treats opposition members in terms of his answers. I cannot help but think that the critique of us on this side is due in part simply because the opposition refuses to listen to our answers and distorts and misrepresents the truth time and again. Therefore, it is not surprising that, ultimately, we become frustrated.

Take question time today for example. Today, the Premier laid out in very clear terms how successful the Super Vax Weekend was. An extra 12 per cent of people were vaccinated over the course of the Super Vax Weekend—3 100 people were vaccinated at our innovative Bunnings clinics, and 2 200 of the people who got vaccinated at the Bunnings clinics were vaccinated for the first time. As the Minister for Emergency Services said, the opposition does not want to listen to this stuff because it does not like the truth. The opposition hates the fact that Western Australians are getting behind the vaccination effort. It hates the fact that Western Australians have been so successful in managing this COVID-19 pandemic. It will do anything to be negative about this process. Opposition members come into this place, spout mistruths and simply misrepresent reality, yet they expect respect and polite intercourse and dialogue from us, and they simply do not listen to what we say. Despite what we say and despite what we put on the record, they simply go out and continue to spread mistruths.

Another example of that is the comments of the member for Cottesloe that two to five per cent of healthcare workers will not get vaccinated or do not want to get vaccinated. It flows off the tongue, doesn't it? It is easy when he has no commitment to the truth whatsoever. He just lets this stuff flow. It just rolls off the tongue, as though he is somehow not responsible for what says and has no regard for the actual truthfulness of what he says. He gets away with this stuff that, quite frankly, is untrue.

A very small minority of the over 44 000 healthcare workers in Western Australia have at this stage expressed a desire not to be vaccinated and, of course, we are going through the process of dealing with them under our mandatory vaccination directions. But, of course, the opposition ignores all that. It just invents absolute untruths and spouts them out. We have to dig deep to find out their true motivation. The only time that the member for Cottesloe gets excited about the truth is when we are making critiques about Hon Nick Goiran, and when we are—outrageously so—drawing to the public's attention that the most senior legal representative of the Liberal Party, indeed for the

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whole opposition, the shadow Attorney General, is encouraging the very people who are critiquing and criticising and, indeed, threatening the Premier. That is the only time that the member for Cottesloe gets excited. It is the only time he gets hot under the collar. I have no idea why he is so keen to protect Hon Nick Goiran, because as a member of “The Clan” we know what Hon Nick Goiran thinks of the member for Cottesloe—he describes him as an embarrassment. We are on the side of the member for Cottesloe. We actually agree that he is more Liberal, less radical, less, quite frankly, loopy of ideology than, unfortunately, is the majority that now represents the Liberal Party. We actually respect the member for Cottesloe for being a true Liberal and not one of these loopy new forms of Liberal that seems to be in the majority now, and we tolerate him in this place.

The opposition says that it is encouraging vaccination uptake, but we heard a representative of the office of the Leader of the Liberal Party encourage those people who are picketing outside Parliament and intimidating members of Parliament and staff as they come in here to do their lawful business.

The opposition seeks respect, yet it deserves none because of its behaviour and its commentary. When 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.

Ms L. Mettam: I wouldn’t.

Mr R.H. COOK: It is extraordinary for her to encourage us to put forward a date, a date that she will regard as rock solid, and which the small businesses in her community will plan around, and that she will not criticise us if we have to change that date further down the road. Quite frankly, that is absolutely laughable! The member for Cottesloe has asked why we do not care about five-year-olds because we are focused on 12-year-olds and up. Quite frankly, the Therapeutic Goods Administration has not approved any vaccine for five-year-olds in Australia. We have regard for the laws of the country, yet they come up with this critique and still expect our respect. It will not be forthcoming while the opposition is so, so critical of the vaccination program and will not come on board and be a force of positivity.

How many times this year has the member for Vasse gone on Facebook and said, “Hey everyone! Get yourself vaccinated. This is a really important part of what we are doing”?

Dr D.J. Honey: Last week!

Mr R.H. COOK: How many times have you done that? How many times have you gone on to Facebook and said, “Please everyone, get yourself vaccinated”?

Dr D.J. Honey: As I said, watch my podcasts. You’re missing out.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): Members!

Mr R.H. COOK: I know that the member for Cottesloe disregards his frontbench, particularly his senior legal officer, and pays no attention to what he says even though in every utterance he makes about the COVID-19 pandemic, he continuously undermines the WA community and government. I know that he does not regard what he says as important, but maybe the person sitting next to him in Parliament, the member for Vasse and shadow Minister for Health, does. I ask again: how many times has the member for Vasse, the shadow Minister for Health, gone on to Facebook this year and said, “Hey everyone! Get yourself vaccinated. Back the program because it will save lives. It will save you and your family and community”?

Ms L. Mettam: I have been promoting it plenty of times, consistently.

Mr R.H. COOK: On Facebook?

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The Minister for Health.

Mr R.H. COOK: The Leader of the Opposition asked for our respect. It will not be forthcoming while the opposition continues to undermine, misrepresent the truth and falsify the facts and present them as truths and, in doing so, undermine the McGowan government and its efforts to keep Western Australians safe. It will not be forthcoming. The opposition says that it supports the vaccination program, but I see nothing from the shadow Minister for Health. All I see is negativity.

Ms L. Mettam: I did it this morning. I had a few words to say about you.

Mr R.H. COOK: Member for Vasse, I know exactly what you say about me—don’t worry about that.

Ms L. Mettam interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Vasse, I think the debate has moved on a little bit. The Minister for Health.

Mr R.H. COOK: Thank you very much, Mr Acting Speaker.

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Of course, the member for Vasse complains about the lack of certainty because businesses in her community are doing it tough. Member for Vasse, I remember going to Busselton shopping centre and trying to find a parking spot. Apart from the fact that I am intimidated by four-wheel drives, a lot of things struck me about that day, including the fact that her shopping centres are not doing it tough. Businesses in Western Australia look at their colleagues in New South Wales and Victoria who would love to be in their situation. The member for Vasse said that cafe owners in her electorate want certainty. I think those cafe owners also want people to be in their cafes without having to wear masks and following the two-square-metre rule. I think she will find that particularly the businesses that rely on regional tourism are saying, “Member for Vasse, shut up! We are going so well. We want a big Christmas. We want to keep our businesses thriving.” Yes, they are struggling to attract the staff they need, but at the end of the day, I think they would rather have that problem than the problem of people in their community dying, of businesses not being able to open at all, of businesses being able to only part open and, when they do open, all their customers having to wear a mask. I think what they will be saying to the member is, “Yes, it would be great to go back to the old days, but we will never get there. We don’t have the old days. We have a global pandemic and we have to manage that.”

How is the government seeking to manage this issue? We want to produce a safe, soft landing and make sure that when the disease comes into the community, it does not let rip and run through the community like wildfire, tearing down businesses, families and the sick and elderly in its path. Hundreds of deaths—that is what it looks like. Look at New South Wales and Victoria. That is what it will look like, folks, if we get this wrong. We have very carefully taken the advice of public health experts to make sure that we find the best possible landing for Western Australians, and we know that the best way to do that is to make sure that people are vaccinated.

I want to share some statistics with the chamber to emphasise the importance of vaccinations. In New South Wales over the course of the last 16 weeks, 61 800 people became infected and, of those, 63.1 per cent were unvaccinated. Of the 8 660 people who were hospitalised, the fully vaccinated made up just 493. This is a disease of the unvaccinated. In the last 16 weeks, 1 015 people have been admitted to intensive care units in New South Wales and just 30 of the more than 1 000 who were admitted to ICU were fully vaccinated. Of the 412 people who died over the last 16 weeks, just 47 were vaccinated and, of those, the average age was 82 years. Of the 47 people who were vaccinated, 29 were in a residential aged-care facility. This is a disease of the unvaccinated—people will die. The modelling from public health officials suggests that if we go for a vaccination rate of 90 per cent of those aged 12 years and over compared with 80 per cent of those aged 12 years and over, with public health social measures, such as masks on public transport, at large events and so on, and with strong testing, tracing, isolating and quarantine, we can save 200 Western Australian lives. That is 200 Western Australians who will be with us on the other side of the pandemic who would not be if we had taken the advice of those opposite. If we had taken the advice of those opposite, 200 people would not be here today—they would not be here at the end of the exercise. This is an important issue for people to comprehend. If we do this properly, we can save lives—hundreds of lives. We will not do what the opposition says, which is to throw dates at the wind and grasp a number like 80 per cent. We will do this properly, based on the science, because the science is what has brought us to this point. It is the science and the Western Australian community that has enabled us to be so successful, and that is an important element to keep in mind.

We have said that we will set a date. When we reach an 80 per cent double-dose vaccination rate, we will have a line of sight to an appropriate date for us to aim for. Like Christmas, this is worth waiting for. Currently, just over 81 per cent of our population has received a single dose. By the way, when members look at the national figures and wonder how well Western Australia is doing, they will see that we use the figures for those who are 12 years of age and above, but other states refer to those who are 16 years of age and above. When members see that we are slightly ahead of Queensland, we are actually much more ahead of Queensland. When they see that we are slightly ahead of the Northern Territory, we are actually much more ahead because it counts only those who are 16 years of age and above. When they see that we are pretty much on level-pegging with, or a smidge behind, South Australia, do not forget that it counts those who are 16 years of age and above but we count those who are 12 years of age and above. Why do we count those who are 12 years of age and above? It is because we care about kids and we know that if we get that cohort vaccinated as well, we will continue to save many more lives, because they are carriers.

We will hit that 80 per cent double-dose vaccination rate in about mid-December. How can I be so sure about that? It is because over 80 per cent of people have already had a single dose, so we know that in about three weeks’ time, those people will become double dosed. That is an important concept or dimension of this that people should bear in mind. When we get to around mid-December, we will have line of sight, and we have said very clearly that in late January or early February—this is a window of about a fortnight or three weeks—in that particular envelope, we will hit 90 per cent, and then Western Australia will be in a position to open up, but we will do so on the basis of the science, not on the basis of the rhetoric of those opposite, the negativity of the member for Vasse and the mistruths that come from the opposition on this issue. We will provide the Leader of the Opposition with respect when she has earned it. She has not earned it in this debate because she has continued to undermine and to carp, she has continued her negativity, and through the offices of one of her frontbenchers, Hon Nick Goiran, the opposition has given encouragement to the anti-vax movement. For all the good measures of the Leader of the Opposition, I accept that she personally has been encouraging people not to pay attention to the anti-vaxxers, but a member of her

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frontbench is actually the figurehead—the political leader—of this particular group. She will have our respect when she has earned it. She has not earned it through her mistruths, her negativity and the activities of her frontbench representative. Until she has earned our respect, she will not get it.

DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands) [6.41 pm]: I have to be honest and say that I had to think fairly carefully about what to say in response to the private member's motion before us this evening, because there is a clear plan. When we get to a 90 per cent double-dose vaccination rate of those aged 12 and older, the border restrictions will be eased and there will be a number of baseline public health measures in place. We know that this is expected to be in possibly January or February next year, and we have confirmed that a definitive date will be announced when we hit a double-dose vaccination rate of 80 per cent. This motion seems to be calling for just one thing, and that is a date.

In my previous life, I used to teach outcomes measurement workshops for the community services sector to help the sector better demonstrate the impact it was making with the vulnerable people and populations that it engaged with. A question I would always encourage people to ask of their data, information and evidence was: so what? It was a way of getting people to think about their work beyond the numbers they collected—to think about their impact and purpose. I often used the example of a membership-based organisation that I was a part of that every year would publish a glossy brochure with a whole lot of numbers on it, such as how many new members it had, how many Facebook posts it had done, how many Facebook followers it had or how many letters to the newspaper it had published. But this organisation had an ageing membership, so what we really wanted to know was whether it was recruiting younger members, because its ageing membership was a risk to its ongoing existence. There was no reference to targets, so if it had 1 000 new members but its target was 500, that was fantastic, because it had doubled its target, but if its target was 3 000 members, it was way off base.

We could pick a date, but so what? Does a date meet our purpose? No. Our purpose is to continue to keep WA safe, to continue to maximise that safety and to minimise the health and social impacts once COVID-19 does enter our community, and a date alone does not meet that purpose. A date alone does not meet essential targets of vaccination rates that are based on the evidence underpinned by expert Western Australian health modelling. Vaccination rates provide us with certainty—that is, certainty of our safety. Safety surely remains the key certainty that we are aiming for. A date alone provides just one very small indicator of certainty, but if that date does not include the target of a 90 per cent vaccination rate, in actual fact, it has the potential for a whole different kind of disastrous uncertainty.

Again, as a researcher, I would never rely on one data point alone to make a conclusion, let alone make any recommendations or plans, because that would make me an unethical and incompetent researcher. A date and a date alone is unethical and incompetent. WA's safe transition plan is based on extensive health modelling using a variety of scenarios, including control measures and other variables. These models have been built by epidemiological modellers to simulate what viral transmission might look like, and they are the most appropriate models and evidence to simulate what it might look like if and when COVID-19 arrives in Western Australia. They are models that are developed and used by health experts based on health data and evidence. In addition to vaccination rates, these models consider public health and social measures, testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine and border restrictions; therefore, our transition plan includes reference to all these points of evidence. That is not just a date.

We said that a key data point is vaccination rates. Again, we are very clear on this: when we reach a 90 per cent double-dose vaccination rate of people aged 12 years and over, WA's controlled border will ease, with testing and vaccination requirements in place. Interim baseline public health and social measures will be applied, and, again, these are very clear. We are going to have to wear masks for particular high-risk indoor settings, for example, and we will have to provide proof of vaccination for large events. That is very clear.

Again, as a researcher, comparing data is an important part of our competent and ethical approaches. When we return to the modelling, there are some very clear and significant differences between vaccination rates of 80 and 90 per cent, and I use "significant" in its research sense. The numbers are meaningful, but they are also very significant in health and human terms. Based on the modelling, on a peak day of COVID-19, at a vaccination rate of 80 per cent we would see 987 symptomatic cases. This goes down to 338 at a vaccination rate of 90 per cent. At a vaccination rate of 80 per cent, we would have 178 general ward beds in use, compared with just 54 beds at a vaccination rate of 90 per cent. One of the big differences is in our ICU beds. We would see 92 ICU beds in use at a vaccination rate of 80 per cent compared with just two at a 90 per cent rate. Mortality would go from four on its peak day down to one. That is four people in Western Australia who would die from COVID-19 compared with one at 90 per cent.

If we take that to its cumulative effect over a year, we will have just over 104 000 active cases if we stick to the 80 per cent vaccination rate compared with 43 000 at the proposed 90 per cent vaccination rate. We will have 391 ICU beds full compared with 106. Perhaps most importantly, the mortality rate would go from 313 at an 80 per cent vaccination rate down to 117. That is 200 lives that we could save by waiting until we hit the 90 per cent double-dose vaccination rate. As I said, each of these represents a really significant saving. We can talk about that obviously in terms of costs—savings to our health system, savings to the burden on our health system and economic savings through reduced time away from work due to COVID illness—but, most importantly, we are talking about the

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reduction of the human burdens on individuals, families, communities and businesses, and that is the greatest saving of all.

Like the member for Cottesloe's electorate, my electorate has a high vaccination rate. The rate in one of our local government authorities is up to 95 per cent. I say thank you to the people of Nedlands for rolling up for WA, but I also acknowledge that that is in big part about accessibility, and I acknowledge that for many in my community, we have an incentive around travel for both work and recreation. But many people who live in my electorate also are employed in the health sector, and they take that professional and personal responsibility very seriously, so they have rolled up for WA. Nearly 30 per cent of those in my electorate are aged over 65, and this group tell us again and again how grateful they are for how safe WA has been. Time and again, older people came to me during the pre-poll period to say that their vulnerability had been seen and their health and safety had been protected. Others, like my kids and I, have a personal incentive as well as a health and community one, which is to protect an immunocompromised member of our family.

The members of my electorate have contributed to the vaccination rates that will see borders relaxed, but they also appreciate the need for an evidence-informed vaccination rate, not an arbitrary date. The people of my community want to stay safe. That is the feedback I get—an appreciation of the evidence, the science and the need for strategies that keep us safe. Indeed, that is why they rolled up for WA in the first place.

I get questions about our vaccination strategy, especially for hard-to-reach populations. As we have heard, during the Super Vax Weekend, over 15 000 vaccinations were administered in our state-run clinics alone. One in five of them was at Bunnings, so hand-in-hand with a sausage sizzle. All I got was a juice!

I also saw great success in vaccinations at Lakeside Joondalup Shopping City; at the Claremont Showground, particularly during the Diwali celebrations; and at the Midland community health centres—two geographic locations that are a particular focus as well. There is also a very deliberate and broad-ranging strategy for the culturally and linguistically diverse community in Western Australia. This has been a really important strategy to be equitable and inclusive to provide culturally appropriate messages about COVID-19 and WA's vaccination program. The Department of Health, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Western Australia Police Force have collaborated very closely to engage and communicate to generate greater understanding, enhance awareness and reduce any hesitation. Things like information sessions have been run, as well as stakeholder events, to engage community and cultural leaders to empower them to inform their communities and encourage vaccinations. There have been pop-up clinics at targeted locations such as mosques and different multicultural events in different geographical locations. Much use has been made of trusted messengers to pass on information and, again, raise awareness and give encouragement, particularly the Office of Multicultural Interests, which is connected to hundreds of cultural groups in Western Australia, and the Western Australia Police Force community engagement unit, which has direct connections to hundreds of cultural groups and thousands of individuals from diverse backgrounds. One of the very first options when we ring the 13 COVID hotline is the offer of an interpreter. We have translated resources into 33 languages, including written materials, videos and animations, and that is all about making the information about vaccination accessible. The Roll Up for WA campaign has been spread to print, TV and radio in culturally and linguistically diverse channels.

One of the other groups we are targeting is the 12 to 18-year-olds; of course, they are one of the last groups to be offered vaccinations, so they have had the smallest window to be vaccinated, making them another target group. All government and non-government secondary schools across the state have been offered the opportunity to participate in the COVID-19 schools vaccination program. Again, it has looked different for different needs in different locations. There have been in-reach vaccination for schools, with a focus on schools in high-need geographical areas. We have been bussing students—as some of us heard on the way in this morning!—to local community vaccination clinics in both metropolitan and regional areas. We have also been arranging local solutions that best meet school needs—for example, a local GP attending a school and a trusted Aboriginal medical service providing vaccinations to schools where there is a high Aboriginal population. From a metropolitan perspective, as of today, over 70 schools have participated in the term 4 2021 schools COVID-19 vaccination program and that looks like more than 4 300 vaccinations that have been delivered to 12 to 18-year-olds so far. As of 5 November in regional areas, over 5 800 vaccination doses have been delivered to 12 to 18-year-olds throughout the state, including state clinics and services such as the schools program. In total, as of today, across the state, over 62 000 12 to 15-year-olds and over 78 000 16 to 19-year-olds have had their first vaccination dose.

All these efforts, including those for other vulnerable populations, such as those experiencing homelessness, are moving us towards that evidence-based target of a 90 per cent vaccination rate. When we have that kind of certainty—the health, economic and human certainty of that vaccination rate—we will have the certainty of a point in time. Thank you.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.54 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution to this debate, but, really, it is a debate that we did not need to have, it seems, because all the arguments have been

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completely dispatched by the member for Nedlands! It is incumbent upon me to take us through until the adjournment, but I feel as though there is almost nothing left to say!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr D.A.E. Scaife): That has not stopped you before, member for Mount Lawley!

Several members interjected.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Harsh but fair, Acting Speaker!

This is what the Premier said during question time: we have a safe transition plan. It is designed to have a minimal impact and it is based on expert health advice. A 90 per cent vaccination rate is far safer, as we heard from the member for Nedlands. Eighty-one per cent of people aged over 12 years have already had their first dose. Our success with the vaccination rollout in Western Australia is even more remarkable, as the Premier said, when we take into account the particular circumstances that pertain to our state. We did not get the extra doses that Victoria and New South Wales got when they were gripped by the outbreaks of the COVID pandemic. We were not allowed the shorter period between doses to accelerate our fully vaccinated rate. We did not suffer from a massive outbreak that crystallised the need for people to get vaccinated straightaway because of the immediate threat they faced. We had the benefit—the Minister for Health made this point in his contribution—of 28 271 people being vaccinated over the weekend.

What disturbs me about the approach adopted by opposition members is that they say that they support our vaccination strategy. I am sure that the member for Central Wheatbelt thinks people should get vaccinated. I am sure that the member for Moore thinks people should get vaccinated. I am sure—I hope—that the member for Cottesloe thinks people should get vaccinated. I am sure the member for Vasse thinks —

Dr D.J. Honey: Watch my podcast, member.

Mr R.H. Cook: Member, you can't watch a podcast. You listen to a podcast.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The member for Mount Lawley has the call.

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: Multidimensional!

The trouble is, even though they say that they support vaccination and our efforts to get Western Australians vaccinated, they persist in bringing motions like this before the chamber. I will summarise the motion: this house condemns the state government for its failure to deliver a clear WA safe transition plan. In terms of the first proposition in the motion—I am keeping you up, member for Central Wheatbelt—the member was just wrong. The clear, safe transition plan was announced last Friday. The member may have missed it. Perhaps she was attending to something else. The plan is there. It seems to me that the full extent of the criticism made by the opposition over our vaccination rate is the failure to set a date. That is its number one criticism about a safe transition plan. The Deputy Premier summarised it beautifully. The opposition's concern is that it wants a fixed date. We said it will be sometime between the last week of January and the first week of February. That is the sum total of the case that the opposition is bringing against us. It is irrelevant. It is completely out of context and out of all proportion.

The problem is that members opposite do their cause no good because by bringing on this motion, they are saying to the people of Western Australia once again, "We are looking to undermine the government's efforts to vaccinate the population." But do members know what? They will not succeed because the government will get people vaccinated. That is not my view; it is the view of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. This is about Australia generally, not just Western Australia, but the argument holds. An article dated 9 November, yesterday, headed "Australia surges past UK, Israel, US in vaccine rollout", states —

After a slow start, the latest vaccination figures put Australia in an enviable position in the global efforts to stop the spread of the pandemic.

A greater proportion of Australia is now fully vaccinated against COVID-19 than in many countries that led the early stages of the global rollout.

This week, the percentage of Australians of any age who have received two vaccine doses overtook the UK for the first time since the vaccines became available, —

No thanks to Scott Morrison. Sorry; that is not in the article; that was gratuitous assistance —

according to the data website ...

It shows 67.26% of the entire population of any age fully vaccinated in Australia, meaning the country has now nudged past the UK proportion of residents ... who are fully inoculated.

Figures from Our World in Data also show the rate of fully vaccinated citizens in Australia increasing faster than almost anywhere else at these later stages of the program.

More people are getting vaccinated more quickly, yet we still have the opposition coming in here and saying things. One of the propositions advanced by the Leader of the Opposition, without any evidence—without any material support, she was just throwing it out there as an ambit claim—was that the lack of a date has without doubt impacted

on the vaccination rates. Where is the authority for that proposition? Where is the support for that proposition? I know who I prefer to listen to. I would rather listen to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners than to somebody who clearly does not know what they are talking about. I will skip forward in this article for those who are paying attention. On vaccine hesitancy, it says —

It already leaves Australia among the most highly vaccinated countries in the world ...

Recent surveys suggest that vaccine hesitancy is now the lowest it has ever been.

Our vaccination rate is going up. It is going past the countries where the COVID pandemic gripped society to a much greater extent than in Western Australia, and vaccine hesitancy is going down. The scaremongering and fearmongering campaign from the member for Cottesloe, who says that two to five per cent of the population in the Department of Health will not get vaccinated, is frankly baseless. The arguments raised by the Leader of the Opposition when she says the lack of a date is impacting our vaccination rollout are thrown up without any support. The arguments by the member for Cottesloe about two to five per cent of the Department of Health not getting vaccinated are thrown up without any support. Worst of all is that although all members of the opposition in this chamber say they support our vaccination program and our vaccine mandates and say they are not acting to undermine the efforts of the Western Australian government to keep the Western Australian community safe, there is one person—not in this chamber; Hon Nick Goiran in the Legislative Council—who persists in his efforts.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.