

CORONAVIRUS — HOTEL QUARANTINE

**1. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:**

Madam Speaker, with your indulgence, may I congratulate you on your elevation to the role of Speaker and thank you for your earlier words regarding the importance and gravity of our roles in this chamber. I note that you are the first woman to hold the title of Speaker and that you bring 27 years of experience to the role. I am hoping there will be some indulgence, at least in the first week, for the Leader of the Opposition as she also steps into a new role. Thank you and congratulations.

I refer to the shambolic press conference held last Thursday at which the Mercure hotel was described as not one of the best, then, least best-fitted, and finally, least good by the Premier, then his health minister, then the acting Chief Health Officer.

- (1) Can the Premier confirm that his state government had known for weeks prior to the press conference that the Mercure hotel was considered the highest risk of all hotels in use because of inadequate ventilation?
- (2) Can the Premier confirm that he ignored recommendations in a report prepared by Laurie Glossop for the health department and continued to use the Mercure hotel for quarantine?
- (3) Can the Premier confirm that, because of this, his government is responsible for the outbreak that put lives at risk and for the lockdown that cost businesses millions of dollars?

**Mr M. McGOWAN replied:**

- (1)–(3) Madam Speaker, can I once again congratulate you on your ascension to the role of Speaker. I acknowledge and congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on her ascension to the role of Leader of the Opposition. I knew the member's father and I am sure he would be very proud of her. I also acknowledge the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and congratulate the member for Moore in his role. I acknowledge the member for Cottesloe and congratulate him on becoming the Leader of the Liberal Party after less than one term, I think, in the house. He is just a spring chicken! I also acknowledge the member for Vasse on becoming the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. I congratulate all the ministers who were re-elected in the government. It is a great honour and privilege. I acknowledge all the members who were re-elected or elected for the first time in particular at the state election in March. It is terrific to see new members be elected. It is a very exciting experience and something to treasure as a great privilege.

Now to the question, Mr Speaker —

**The SPEAKER:** Madam.

Several members interjected.

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Madam Speaker—you might have to get used to that for a little while!

To the events of the last week, it was obviously very regrettable. We have been through the experience of COVID for 14 months or so now. We had a lockdown in the first half of last year, five days of lockdown in January this year and the three-day lockdown over the weekend. As we have always said over the course of the last year, hotel quarantine is not a perfect solution. There is no perfect solution. The Prime Minister said in recent days that hotel quarantine is 99.9 per cent effective and that is true; it is 99.9 per cent effective. The problem is that if a 0.1 per cent problem arises, the consequences can be quite severe, which is what we experienced. Other cities around Australia have experienced exactly the same thing because hotel quarantine is not ideal. As I recall, this has happened in Sydney on at least five occasions and in Melbourne on many occasions, where some of the consequences have been far, far, far more dire than those here. Brisbane and Adelaide have also had this experience.

The Mercure was adopted as a quarantine hotel and it is an older hotel. It is one of the nine hotels that we are using for this purpose. The ventilation system inside the rooms causes positive pressure. That means the ventilation system pushes air, in effect, out of the room into the corridor, or else there is no air in the corridor. Each room does that. At the Mercure, a COVID-positive person was in one room and somehow transmitted the air from that room through a door, across a corridor, through another door and into a positive-pressure room. The report that was conducted indicated that these issues could be mitigated and managed. Mitigations and management were progressively put in place, because members have to understand that the hotels are operational. As measures are put in place, it is while the hotels are operational, so it is an ongoing process. We cannot clear everyone out because we do not have anywhere to put them, so it is an ongoing process to put in place those mitigations. A whole range of mitigations were put in place and will continue to be put in place.

In light of what occurred, the government has decided that three hotels will be retired—that is, the Mercure, the Four Points by Sheraton Perth and the Novotel Perth Langley—from hotel quarantine for returning Australians or people coming from higher risk countries. They will be transferred to be used for what are called seasonal workers.

They are people from Tonga or Vanuatu who will come into Australia to work in horticulture and agriculture in Western Australia. They are low risk because they come from countries that have not had any infections. That is the arrangement we have put in place. For 14 months, we have said it is an imperfect solution. We have done our best in difficult circumstances.