

CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Matter of Public Interest

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

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

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [3.22 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the McGowan Labor Government to outline its medical and economic response to the coronavirus.

The reason the opposition has raised this issue in the Parliament today is the gross lack of action on the part of the Premier of Western Australia, Mark McGowan, and the Labor Government, in responding to the coronavirus, or COVID-19 as it has since been named. The Premier has been absolutely missing in action when it comes to these matters.

Mr B.S. Wyatt interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Premier has been sulking because he has lost his wingman, the Treasurer. The Premier has definitely been sulking.

What the opposition will outline today is that we are dealing with a very serious issue. On 23 January this year, China took the not insubstantial step of closing down an entire province and quarantining and restricting the movement of its citizens. It is very serious for a country of that size to place those measures on the movement of its people. That was followed by the cancellation of the most significant event in the Chinese calendar, the three-week festival to celebrate Chinese New Year.

One would think that in January, this state government would have gone to work and taken action to try to understand the consequences for the Western Australian community should this virus reach our shores. One would think also that the government would try to understand the consequences for this state's very weak domestic economy, which suffered a one per cent shrinkage last financial year, and how it could respond to keep the domestic economy ticking along in the wake of the serious economic shocks that this state could face as a result of the actions taken by one of our major trading partners. However, we have seen no action from this government.

We know that this government is completely caught up in its own spin. This government is one of the biggest employers of journalists in this country. In preparing for this motion today, I looked at some of the media releases that have been issued since the start of January from the Minister for Health and the Premier. The Minister for Health issued 19 media releases up until yesterday, 9 March. Not one of those media releases addressed the coronavirus response by the Department of Health—not one.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members! This is a very serious issue. I want silence; and, when government members speak, I want silence on the other side. It is a very serious issue.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The Premier has put out over 50 media releases since 1 January. How many of those addressed the government's response to the threat of COVID-19? Zero! There was not one media response from the Premier. I accept that on 11 and 13 February, the Premier made a statement to the house outlining that he was meeting with the business community. There was also a statement from the Minister for Tourism about the bushfires and coronavirus. However, the public of Western Australia does not necessarily pay attention to the Parliament. The public of Western Australia expects a coordinated response from the government when it comes to an issue about which people are clearly very fearful.

Several members interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Members opposite can mock what we are saying.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Transport! I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Members should look at the response of the community of Western Australia, which, in the information vacuum that was the government of Western Australia, has started to act fearfully based on the fear campaigns that are being propagated through social media.

Several members interjected.

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The SPEAKER: Order! I will start calling everyone in the chamber. I said before that this is a very serious issue. Government members will have the opportunity to answer all these questions later. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, even though members might not agree with it.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Just to bring home the gravity of this situation to those members who want to heckle from the cheap seats at the back of the house, according to the World Health Organization —

Ms S.E. Winton interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo, I call you to order for the first time. If this continues, I will not hesitate. I can throw anyone out if I think they are disrupting Parliament—on one or two calls—so do not push me.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: According to the World Health Organization, this is the current situation globally. Over 110 000 people, and 105 countries, have been impacted by this virus. Also, according to the World Health Organization, 3 817 people have died, but media outlets are reporting that the death toll is now over 4 000. China has over 80 000 cases, including over 3 000 deaths. South Korea has over 7 000 cases. Italy has over 7 000 cases, and today placed travel restrictions and bans on large gatherings across the entire country, after its death toll jumped yesterday from 366 poor souls to 463. Australia has 77 confirmed cases and three very sad deaths. As I understand it, Western Australia has six confirmed cases, although that changes regularly, and we have had one death, as outlined by the Minister for Tourism today, namely Mr James Kwan, who was a passenger on the *Diamond Princess*.

That is the situation we are facing. That is the information that has been available to the public through the media. They are not receiving information on what they are supposed to do if they suspect they have COVID-19. Are they supposed to go to their general practitioner and risk potentially infecting elderly and at-risk people who might be in the waiting room with other illnesses? Should they go to an emergency room? What are GPs supposed to do? Have GPs been provided with the information they need to manage COVID-19? According to the Australian Medical Association, which came out with the gloves on last Friday, no, they have not. To quote from a media report on WAtoday yesterday morning —

The state government has been warned the public will lose confidence in its coronavirus messaging if it insists “it’s all business as usual” and is not completely transparent about the extent of the crisis.

This is what the opposition is asking the government to do. The public of Western Australia can actually be trusted with information. It is in the absence of information that bizarre behaviour, such as people fighting over toilet tissue, becomes a problem. People only behave like that when they are afraid, and information is the key to allaying the fears of the community.

I turn to an article headed “The West Live: AMA president Tony Bartone says WA’s frontline staff feel ‘misinformed, underprepared’ over the coronavirus crisis”, which states —

Perth doctors on the front lines of the coronavirus crisis are feeling misinformed and underprepared according to the federal president of the Australian Medical Association.

Dr Tony Bartone this morning told The West Australian’s Jenna Clarke on the first edition of the West Live podcast many of his colleagues in WA were experiencing a lack of protective equipment as well as inconsistent and poorly-circulated information.

In response to these matters, the state government says that it is a federal government problem. The state government is responsible for the management of critical health care in Western Australia—it always has been and always will be. The state government was dragged kicking and screaming into the community for a response yesterday, after the AMA raised concerns and after we had all this absurd behaviour by a frightened public in response to the information vacuum. What did they have to say this morning? It is four weeks too late. At the fever clinics, people are sitting in plastic chairs with plastic tape around them. An article on WAtoday is headed “‘Four weeks too late’: Garden chairs, yellow tape mark Perth COVID-19 clinics opening” and states —

Australian Medical Association WA president Andrew Miller said the clinics were four weeks too late.

He said GPs were expected to do the same as the nurse pictured, but without the appropriate protections.

“It’s distressing that the government are expecting GPs to operate not only without the facilities that they have here, but without that sort of gear,” Dr Miller said.

...

Dr Miller said the state was three to five weeks behind in preparing for an outbreak.

“It’s all about the numbers exploding and trying to stay ahead of it. I didn’t get a sense of urgency from the Premier ... in terms of the response,” he said.

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...

... now was the time to get telehealth going, the hospitals ready and thinking about closing down schools as a pre-emptive measure.

Several members interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Those are the words of the AMA president, member for Morley. I will sum up, because my colleagues have words they would like to contribute to this matter of public importance. We need to understand what preparations have been made for our health system. Will there be enough beds? Will there be enough beds in intensive care units and high dependency units? Will there be enough health workers and will they have protective gear? Has provision been made to provide protective gear to GPs, who will be at the front line? What is happening with our older people in aged-care facilities? What kind of work is being done with seniors, who are most at risk of getting serious complications if they contract this virus? What information is being given to them? They all have a Seniors Card. It would be very easy to contact these people and provide them with information on how to protect themselves and keep themselves safe, and to tell them not to be fearful or act in bizarre ways, as we have seen in the supermarkets of Western Australia over the past couple of weeks. Even the public toilets at my local supermarket have had the toilet paper stolen! Goodness knows why, but that is what people do when they are frightened—they act bizarrely. It is the role of the government to allay those fears by having a coherent plan that people can understand, so that they know, should they come down with this virus, what actions they need to take to limit the possibility of infecting other people, where they can get help, how they will be provided for and how they will be treated in hospital. We need a guarantee from the Premier that everything is being taken care of and that people will not be on gurneys in hospital corridors or queued in ambulances when they need ICU or HDU care in our hospitals. All we are asking for is information so that the fears of the community can be allayed. Instead of the government focusing on its own internal woes, with ministers leaving, members retiring and goodness knows what else, how about focusing on getting the information out to the community of Western Australia so that we can stop this behaviour that is driven by fear that has come from an information vacuum as a result of the inaction of this government.

MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman) [3.35 pm]: This government has had its head in the sand when it comes to the domestic economy over the last three years. It is continuing to have its head in the sand with regard to the coronavirus. What is this government doing about the coronavirus? The first lot of words we heard from the Premier was that the government is in lock step with the federal government. The federal government has made it very clear that it is going to introduce a stimulus package for Australia. When the Premier talks about being in lock step with the federal government, it does not mean that he should sit back and do nothing while the federal government does all the heavy lifting. My understanding of being in lock step is that the state government will be working on its own stimulus package for the coronavirus and that it will make some announcements to give Western Australians the assurance that it is taking the domestic economy into consideration.

The government does not understand that the domestic economy has already been struggling. The initiatives the Premier talked about during question time—he went through and listed a whole heap—were all announced before December and had to do with where the domestic economy was at at that time, before we even confronted the coronavirus issue. I will reiterate where the domestic economy is at. We have had six consecutive quarters of the lowest wage growth in Australia. We have 152 000 households suffering mortgage stress, which is up 67 per cent in three years under this government's watch. Mortgage defaults in Western Australia are nearly double the national average. Last week, we started looking at retail sales, which are pointing towards a recession. This is the December numbers, before the impacts of the bushfires and coronavirus. This was the scenario with our domestic economy already. The Premier chose to ignore that issue and not respond to it. When he now faces the hard question of what the government is doing about coronavirus, the first thing he says is that the government is in lock step with the federal government. What is it doing? It announced a package for tourism. The government said it was the first in Australia to announce a package of \$12 million or \$13 million! But the latest Qantas newsletter predicts further falls in international and domestic travel. Will spending \$12 million or \$13 million on travel really save Western Australia's economy? I am not saying that it is a bad thing—it is a good thing—but is that all the government is looking at to deal with coronavirus? It does not give us any confidence that the government actually understands what is happening in the domestic economy and what it should be doing about it.

It was fascinating to hear the brief ministerial statement from the Treasurer this afternoon, when he talked about falling iron ore prices. Interestingly, the iron ore price is still above the price that the government lifted it to in the mid-year forecast. It increased the forecast iron ore price from \$73.50 to \$85 in the mid-year review. We know that every dollar more is worth \$80 million to the budget bottom line. The price is currently averaging above \$US90. It is still sitting around \$US88, when the average in the mid-year review was \$US85. There is still a few hundred million to spare. The government is spending \$12 million or \$13 million on a program when Qantas is predicting that domestic travel will fall further. The issue is that the Premier is not confronting this issue or assuring people that he is going to do something about it. The Premier flagged before Christmas that the government would

consider freezing power prices in the lead-up to an election, after it whacked households—after it created the environment of 152 000 households in mortgage stress through its increases in power prices. The government created that scenario. Then it flags that it will do it in an election. We are saying to bring it on—commit to the people now. I cannot believe the iron ore price has been as resilient as it has been—I cannot believe it—but it has been. The government has had windfall gains, billions of dollars of additional revenue since it came into power. It has had billions of billions of dollars through the GST fix and iron ore price, but the government sits there saying it will consider it. People are getting really concerned, so the government should commit to it. The government has talked about it—commit to it and really show some leadership. That is what we are asking for in this debate. The government should really take this issue of the domestic economy seriously. The government wants to look at other things it could be doing. Yes, it brought on the payroll tax relief, but we have already described how it equates to 1.1 per cent of the payroll tax the government is going to collect over the next four years—1.1 per cent, that is how much the government is giving back; really generous. The government is going to give back eight per cent of the payroll tax increase, but it will split it over two years, so the second half is not due until next year. We are really concerned about the domestic economy now. The government should have some courage and bring it forward. Have a look at what is required for households out there. That is the issue: households in Western Australia are struggling.

We support the building of regional roads. We agree with that idea. We agree with what the government is doing to encourage more travellers here, but we do not believe these things will solve the issues of Western Australia and its current economic situation. We call on the government to do a lot more, to be a lot more active and up-front, and to not stick its head in the sand about the economic situation for Western Australia as it has done for the past three years. The government should take its head out of the sand, look around, understand, put a plan together and make it very clear to the people of Western Australia.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.41 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Nationals WA to support this very sensible motion. It is a motion asking for the government to outline its medical and economic response to the coronavirus. After the questions we asked in question time today, I am genuinely still concerned that there is not a great deal of clarity, particularly from a regional perspective, Minister for Health and Premier. I do not feel as though Western Australians feel included in this response. We heard an announcement today. Only this morning has there been clarity that there may—there may—be virus clinics rolled out in regional Western Australia. We understand that this is complex and it is a movable feast, but we are getting reports from regional Western Australia. The reason we asked the question today and tried to get some clarity about whether patients should report to the emergency department or general practitioners is that GPs are saying that patients are telling them that they have been redirected away from EDs, and from other GPs, and that in the middle of all of this are people who could potentially be creating risk in their communities. People genuinely want to do the right thing. What if a person is in Geraldton, Albany, Bunbury, Karratha or any of those big regional centres with the capability of setting up one of these clinics? We do not have any time lines on these clinics; there was no clarification on that topic today. For instance, if someone is in Wyalkatchem, Bidyadanga or somewhere more remote than those big regional centres, what coordination is being provided between those GPs who are the first line of response? It could be a Silver Chain nurse or a doctor, because some of those communities do not have doctors. We need this clarity for regional Western Australians without creating panic. This motion is about asking the government to outline its medical response. We simply want clarity for our constituents in regional Western Australia. As I said, we have already had reports of confusion in the medical profession and in our emergency departments.

The other thing we would like some clarity and confirmation on is whether the conversation has been extended to our emergency services, particularly those that are reliant on a volunteer workforce. Although the Royal Flying Doctor Service is not reliant on volunteers, it has quite a thin workforce, so when those specialist providers are taken out of the mix, there could potentially be an influx or extension of this pandemic, as has been outlined already to this house. What happens when those people are potentially impacted by coronavirus and they are not in the system to provide that support? I know that the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and the mining sector has been particularly concerned about this, particularly the impact on its fly in, fly out workforce. I hope that there will be some clarity provided to the house today that the RFDS has been engaged on that. What is the plan for St John Ambulance? Has it been engaged? In my part of the world, and, indeed, across most of our regional centres, it depends on volunteers, and some of them are very thinly spread. What happens when there are no volunteers available to provide that emergency service response in those communities? How is that going to be managed? I do not think people are panicking just yet, but they are confused and concerned. They are certainly panicking about the toilet paper, which I find utterly ridiculous! But I agree that that is because there is a vacuum of information being provided, which means people automatically go to the worst possible response. That is what is happening because there is no clarity in this information. From a regional perspective we generally want to know what this response will be. I have talked about the medical issues. We certainly have further issues to explore on the economic impacts of this in regional Western Australia, and no doubt they will be explored over the course of this week.

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MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP (Dawesville) [3.45 pm]: The opposition has moved this matter of public interest today and it is in no way critical of the government.

Mr M. McGowan: Ha!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It is not, Premier. It simply suggests that the government outlines to the house its medical and economic response to COVID-19.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I find it fascinating that the government already baulks when all we are trying to do is seek further information on behalf of the people of Western Australia.

Mr P. Papalia: It is a serious matter, and you do not get it.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It is a serious matter, Minister for Tourism, and we treat it seriously, too. At every single point in time the Liberal Party has been willing to work collaboratively with the health minister and the government in taking any measures it deems necessary to help protect the people of Western Australia from this impending crisis. We have said it every single time as part of our commentary out there calling for more information on behalf of the people of Western Australia. All indications are that we are on the precipice of a globally significant and disruptive event that is going to impact significantly on Australia and Western Australia. All of us will probably be impacted by it either directly or indirectly. We have seen that in other jurisdictions nationally. No matter where in the world, we know it is going to have a significant impact. Key to our motion here today, as the Leader of the Opposition said, is to allay the fears and concerns of the Western Australian public. That is all we are trying to do. The best way to do that is simply to provide more information to the people of Western Australia. I appreciate that it has been some months since the first clusters of pneumonia outbreaks in Hubei province, and Wuhan in particular. It has been a number of months since then. We realise that there has been a rapid reproduction rate. We realise that this is difficult and it is an environment with a lot of unknowns, as the Minister for Health said in his brief ministerial statement today, but there is still significant information that could be forthcoming from this government to help allay some of those fears. They are not just fears from people in Western Australia. They are fears from clinicians and frontline workers. The Premier mentioned them in his own answer to a question from us. They are fears from retail staff. Everyone is concerned; everyone is frustrated. We simply want more information.

The Premier must concede that the handling of this and the communication thus far has been significantly lacking.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: It has been. If that was the case, Minister for Tourism, if the Premier was satisfied with how things had been handled, I suspect he would not have installed the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to help manage things. I suspect that the coordination would not have had to have occurred because Health would have been in control from the beginning.

I refer members very quickly to why communication to the public is so important. This is a World Health Organization document entitled “Outbreak Communication: Best Practices for Communicating with the Public during an Outbreak”. It states —

As a third feature, outbreaks are usually alarming events that can elicit great anxiety in the general public. This anxiety can endure even when new knowledge about the outbreak is reassuring. The extreme behaviours that can result are well documented and range from the wearing of masks and avoidance of travel, through fear of hospitals and stigmatization of patients and minority groups, to riots, loss of confidence in governments, and significant drops in consumer consumption.

The document, a World Health Organization document to guide governments about how it should communicate to the public, goes on to say —

... outbreak control can be severely impeded when —

I will paraphrase with the word “officials” —

decide to withhold information about an outbreak, downplay its significance ...

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This media interest has several implications for outbreak control. On the positive side, the media can be used very effectively, especially at the start of an outbreak, to create an informed public, as good reporting translates technical information into lay language and can help the public understand the situation ...

Further, the document goes on to say —

In the absence of constantly flowing information from a respected source, rumours will fill the void and take on a life of their own.

It is concerning, therefore, that we have seen a number of times from this government an unwillingness to be forthcoming with as much information as possible. It took the Liberal Party to write to the minister, wanting a public awareness campaign, pushing him for it —

Mr M. Hughes interjected.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: His response, member for Kalamunda, was that we should wait weeks before such a campaign would be initiated. Then a day after that when significant public pressure came on him —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: — he flipped and said that a public awareness campaign would be only days away. After initially suggesting that it would be weeks, it changed to days.

Ms R. Saffioti interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Transport, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Secondly, we have seen the same response from this government when we called for the expedited rollout of COVID clinics. The minister responded initially suggesting that this would take weeks. Again, public pressure began to mount; he flipped and said that it would take a matter of days. We have seen it again with testing. Days ago, testing was going to be confined only to people who had been travelling to affected countries. There was, clearly, significant public pressure and concern about the testing regime —

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Tourism, do you want to go home early?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: — then the advice changed once again. It cannot be that the government is so slow in responding until there is public pressure and then, finally, the government decides to act.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister, you will have your chance to reply.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I find it fascinating and disappointing when the Premier goes on television programs like *Flashpoint* last night and his response is that people should consider buying a car—that there is some economic stimulation. When there is such concern about the economic disruption in our community, the response is to buy a vehicle. I find that not a particularly nuanced way to communicate to the people of Western Australia to try to allay their fears and concerns. Thirdly, until the suite of brief ministerial statements that came from this government today—in anticipation, I suspect, of a forthright opposition questioning this government—I had yet to see any information from the Premier, for example, about being prepared. On Sunday, the Premier issued a tweet. It said —

Stockpiling goods can be very harmful for people who already struggle to afford groceries or get to the shops.

...

... we all just buy what we need, when we need it.

... stay calm.

Mr M. Hughes: So you disagree with him?

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: No. The Premier today, though, said that it is important to prepare and make sure that people have enough stores of food in their households. This is consistent, I have to say, with advice from other jurisdictions across the country. Until today I had yet to hear any similar advice from the Premier of Western Australia. This information could have been far more forthcoming from the government. We want to know what the government's clear and comprehensive plan is to deal with this? We would like to know when the cabinet was first briefed on this matter and what decisions were immediately made to help respond to this impending crisis. The communications from the government have been lacking. There is significant concern and fear in the community, and the Premier compels the people of Western Australia to be calm. Stay calm; be alert but not alarmed, as it were. People would

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feel a lot more calm, I suspect, if they were much more informed by this government. The World Health Organization continues to prove it. All the epidemiology facilities across the world point to the need for communications to be an important part of any response from a government so that people can feel like they are as best informed as possible. People, until recently, did not know where to get tested. People, until recently, were worried about the provision of personal protection equipment for clinicians, for example. The Leader of the Opposition quoted the Australian Medical Association president, who said that, clearly, in Western Australia, there is a concern with the lack of information, and clinicians are worried. It is not only the opposition suggesting this. On his radio show earlier last week, Gareth Parker said, according to my notes, that —

The WA government's response to coronavirus is looking disorganised, reactive and Pollyanna-ish. They are not being straight with the public and telling them everything they know because they think the public will panic. The government has been caught flat-footed at every turn.

I appreciate that the Premier will undoubtedly suggest that somehow the opposition are politicising this. I appreciate that somehow the government members will undoubtedly change this matter of public interest to make it a political tool for the government of Western Australia to somehow grandstand on this. That is not what we want. We want a considered response from this government to help inform the people of Western Australia, because there is a lot of fear and frustration. Everything we know points to the fact that people should simply be more informed and they would be better off for it. It is not only us saying this; absolutely the people of Western Australia are concerned. The media has been saying this for some time. The people of Western Australia simply deserve, I believe, more information. To be perfectly frank, they deserve some authentic leadership at a time of crisis from this Premier.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.53 pm]: Obviously, the coronavirus that is causing a significant issue around the world deserves to be taken seriously and governments around the world need to work cooperatively. That is exactly what we are doing. We are working cooperatively with the commonwealth government to deal with the issue. I have had a range of communications directly with the Prime Minister to ensure that Western Australia is well prepared and works cooperatively with federal government agencies on this matter. That is what people want. They want a calm, considered, non-panicked approach to this issue in health, economic and government services across the community, and that is exactly what this government has engaged in ever since this issue arose earlier this year. Today from the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA, we have seen shocking, appalling, embarrassing scaremongering. They are trying to politicise an issue that should not be politicised. They come in here with a grab bag of ill-conceived criticisms, not based upon any fact, and every Liberal and National in this chamber should be ashamed of themselves for what they are doing. This is a serious issue and they come in here with these outrageous, appalling and vicious attacks about an issue that is causing community concern and on which all sides of politics should work together. I am working well with the federal Liberal–National government, as is the health minister and Treasurer, on a daily basis. But members are coming in here with these ill-conceived, vicious, nuanced and nasty attacks with no effect to them.

The Leader of the Opposition's tweets are appalling. Her Facebook commentary is shocking. To come in here and blame me for the panic buying because I have not put out enough press releases—that was her suggestion. If I had put out more press releases, panic buying would not be occurring across Western Australia.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you had silence.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Panic buying is occurring across Western Australia. I listened to that member in silence. Panic buying is occurring across Australia and the world, and my view is that it is wrong and it is silly and it is unnecessary. That view is shared by the Leader of the National Party. But then the Leader of the Opposition says that I am to blame for it because I have not put out enough press releases. That is the level of her argument. Yesterday on the radio, the Leader of the Opposition said that we are not communicating enough because we are doing only radio, online and newspaper, and we should put signs on the back of buses. That was her argument yesterday on the radio. The Leader of the Opposition is looking around for anything to criticise and sometimes she goes too far—in fact, she goes too far all the time. Those sorts of criticisms are, frankly, embarrassing. She then rolls in the impending retirement of the Treasurer and somehow I am caught up in that. Did the Leader of the Opposition not see the news about why the Treasurer is retiring from Parliament? Did she not see the commentary about it—his serious family health issue? She then tries to politicise that in her commentary—honestly! The press should do an analysis of the Leader of the Opposition and her commentary because it is shameful. It is shocking. It is embarrassing. It is politicising the retirement of the Treasurer and politicising the coronavirus, which is impacting the world, and somehow I am to blame for the panic buying across the community. I mean, seriously! Come up with some serious arguments rather than this ridiculous scaremongering that the Leader of the Opposition is carrying on with.

To the motion itself, as a range of ministers and I have outlined today, a comprehensive approach to dealing with the health issues across Western Australia is being implemented. Comprehensive plans are being put in place to

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deal with issues concerning schools, transport, public gatherings and the like, should the situation require it. A range of measures have been put in place to support industry in Western Australia. The health minister and the Treasurer will take members through some of the measures, but I want to outline some of the headline things that we have done.

As I have said—I know it may have passed some members by—when this issue first became significant in Australia, with the stopping of travel between China and Western Australia on 1 February, the Prime Minister called me. I was sitting at the Miami Bakehouse pie shop with my children, eating a pie. He called me and I called my staff and I convened a bunch of roundtable meetings for the following Monday, 3 February with the mining industry, agriculture, international students and tourism—separate events—to hear from them about what they thought the impact might be. We took it so seriously that we led Australia in our economic response. We were the first state to do so. It stands to reason, considering Western Australia's trading relationship with China, that we should lead Australia in relation to those things. I called them all together. I heard their concerns and immediately corresponded with the federal government about what needed to happen at ports, with student visas and in tourism. We did that immediately, and we received some response and clarification from the commonwealth, which industry appreciated. I might add that industry has actually congratulated us. Chris Rodwell, the head of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia; Paul Everingham, the head of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy; and Evan Hall, the head of Tourism Council Western Australia have all said, to a person, that this government led the nation in its economic response. The three most senior industry association heads in Western Australia have all said that this government led the nation in its response.

After that, I immediately, with other ministers, engaged with our Chinese partners in the airline industry, business and government, to make sure that the relationship was kept strong because obviously the issue was very much focused on China initially and we had to keep the relationship strong so that when the virus lifts, we still have that relationship and can get the flights back and keep the strong trade, and get back the students and tourists. We engaged in that immediately. The Minister for Asian Engagement, the Treasurer, the Minister for Tourism, other ministers and I—all of us across government—worked on that.

In recent days we have taken up with the commonwealth government the case for Western Australia and the commonwealth stimulus package. The Minister for Transport and I have been onto the federal government about the regional roads package. That will save lives in the regions and can be implemented immediately. We are working on all those initiatives on top of the other things we did. Within a few days of speaking with the Prime Minister, we responded with the tourism package. We were the first government in Australia to do it. We saw that there was an issue and we responded. The Minister for Tourism is about to launch an advertising campaign to get Western Australians to holiday at home. Again, we are leading the nation on those things. During question time I outlined the five stimulus measures we have put in place over the last few months: tax cuts, payroll and stamp duty relief, spending in hospitals and schools and TAFE fee cuts. They are five initiatives worth \$500 million, or thereabouts, to stimulate economic activity starting immediately. Today we launched rail manufacturing. We are hopeful of getting a good outcome on submarine maintenance in Western Australia. We are doing a range of things to ensure that the Western Australian economy is protected.

Another thing we want to do is send the right messages to the public. The shadow Minister for Health condemned me for calling on Western Australian consumers to continue to support local businesses. Honestly, did members hear him? He actually criticised me for saying to the public—this is what I said—that if they are going to buy a car, please buy a car. I do not know about other members but I go to the car dealerships in my electorate. They are local people. They work locally. They support families. I visited the Holden dealership recently. They are in a bit of trouble. I also visited a Mazda dealership to listen to them. I want to make sure that those businesses—they are real people—continue to have customers, and I got condemned for it.

Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup: You were terrible.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There he goes again. He is condemning me for it. I called on people to go to cafes, restaurants, shops and movie theatres and continue to support our small businesses, but I get condemned for it by the Liberal Party. Seriously! What is going through their heads? I will go to the Council of Australian Governments on Friday and take up the case for Western Australia and for continuing to work cooperatively with the commonwealth government on health and the economy. Clearly, we have created more capacity in the budget to do things because of our financial management. That is a fact, and that is acknowledged across the country and by every political party bar the Western Australian state branch of the Liberal Party. Every other government and every other party in the country acknowledges that we have got the finances back in control, something that the opposition let run riot, and that gives us greater capacity to respond.

The Minister for Health will respond next. Every single day we publish updates. The COVID-19 updates with the facts for the public are very simple. They are published in the paper, online on the Health website and on

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Facebook pages of government ministers and me to make sure that, as much as possible, we get the information out to the public. The public, in many ways, is being deluged with information from across the world. I cannot control that. But we are providing simple, up-to-date information and medical services and support that did not exist before. The COVID clinics are there. We will roll them out more broadly, as we have said, as time goes by. We have worked with the commonwealth government to ensure there is funding assistance for these initiatives, and that will take place. We have ensured that we will limit the impact on public servants and school students as much as humanly possible. We have worked with public sector unions in the public sector to make sure that the requirements for self-isolation and the like, for the public sector workforce, is put in place properly. I have met with the major minors to talk about the arrangements for FIFO camps and FIFO workforces and other workforces across the state. We have activated the State Hazard Plan for Human Biosecurity. We have been working with the police. The Commissioner of Police, the deputy commissioner and I have been working together to make sure that our police are protected as best as possible and ready to step up from non-frontline roles into frontline roles, if necessary.

All these things are being done and we are publishing all this information. That is what is occurring. What we do not need is silly, petty, pathetic sniping from the state opposition Liberals and Nationals trying to pick holes in this serious issue for cheap political points. A Western Australian has died. People have suffered from sickness and further people could suffer from sickness. This is a time for all levels of government and for all political parties to work cooperatively and not have this ridiculous, petty nitpicking that the opposition is engaged in today.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [4.06 pm]: This is one of those moments in political life when a member decides what sort of public figure they are going to be. Are they going to be an MP of respect, courtesy, professional courtesy and considered response or are they going to be politically opportunistic and try to insert themselves into the limelight by simply going for cheap political pointscore? That is the decision we all must make in political life, members, and in life. When we come across these sorts of issues, it is appropriate that we respond in a way that generates respect in the community. What we are calling for here today is for members to conduct themselves in a respectful manner that will earn the respect of the public and assist Western Australians to deal with this COVID virus epidemic. We know that the situation is evolving and that the COVID virus has pretty much achieved technical global pandemic status. Western Australia, like the rest of Australia, will be impacted by that. The Department of Health has been working tirelessly with its national and international counterparts to ensure that Western Australia is as prepared for the likelihood that this virus will be more widespread in the community. The Chief Health Officer has formally escalated the State Hazard Plan for Human Biosecurity to response phase. On 7 March, the Chief Health Officer formally escalated the Infectious Disease Emergency Management Plan to target action phase. A dedicated public health emergency operation centre team, known as PHEOP, staffed by communicable disease control experts has been in operation since January. This team has been working closely with hospitals to ensure that relevant capacity and logistics are in place to meet the demands of the evolving situation.

All six of WA's COVID-19 cases have acquired infection outside Australia or via a close contact with a person who has returned from travel abroad. At present, there has been no known local transmissions of the virus. This is a really important point to make. Western Australia has been served exceptionally well by the Department of Health and its communicable disease team to ensure that we have held off the spread of the virus through the community. The impact of that is being felt now and it will be felt later. The longer that we can move within the containment and isolation phase—making sure that we identify the people who have the COVID virus and those who they have had contact with and isolate them—without the need to move to a treatment and response to phase, the further we will extend the peak of this disease and lower the severity of that peak. For the benefit of members, they can see that if we do not act now in an effective manner, the peak of the virus epidemic will impact on the community much sooner and much more sharply. The longer we can hold off in this containment and isolation phase, the longer we can hold off that peak and the lower that peak will be.

We have no community-based transmission of the disease in Western Australia. That is an extremely enviable situation for us to be in, one that the other states are not currently enjoying. We are in a great position to combat this virus, but we cannot rest on our laurels. There will come a time when we will have community-based transmission of the disease—that is, people acquire a disease from an unknown source somewhere within the community. That is why we are escalating our response in a manner that is commensurate with the level of risk. That includes the implementation of the three walk-in COVID clinics at Royal Perth Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Fiona Stanley Hospital. In an answer to a question earlier today I said that we will be rolling these out into the regional areas of Western Australia as the need arises. I suspect that in the first instance, that would be in Bunbury, as it is the biggest regional population centre. Our other big population centres in regional Western Australia will likely require these as well, particularly Albany, which has a higher age demographic, and we know that older people in the community are most impacted by this virus. These clinics are open from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm. The

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member for Dawesville would like to think that he is the brainchild of the COVID clinics and that he is responsible for bringing these on early, but the fact of the matter is that these have been in the planning processes since around mid-February when we could see the inevitable spread of this disease. Once we appointed Dr Robyn Lawrence as deputy Chief Health Officer, this enabled us to roll these clinics out as a matter of urgency. We are the ones who are commanding the timeline. We are the ones who are rolling out these long-established plans and making sure that we can best protect members of the community.

I want members to understand that the member for Dawesville has said that the government is withholding information from the public, particularly about the flight details of a particular patient, and the opposition health spokesperson uses language such as —

... the government’s default position “is to tell us very little information”.

...

“I don’t understand why it took so much pushing from the media before we found out even a simple flight number.

This is an ongoing campaign by the member for Dawesville to undermine the work that is being done by the Chief Health Officer and their team. I want members to understand that when the member for Dawesville uses this language, he is not criticising me, the Premier, or the political arm of the government; he is criticising the Chief Health Officer on whose information we rely. He is criticising the team that is working with the Chief Health Officer, who have been working tirelessly since this issue arose.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr J.N. Carey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Perth!

Mr R.H. COOK: He is criticising those hardworking experts in the field. I know the member for Dawesville is an expert in the field, but on these matters we will rely upon the Chief Health Officer, if members do not mind! On the issue that the member for Dawesville was particularly critical about that day, he was calling on the government to provide details about a flight number that we could not supply at the press conference that we provided the initial information at, because the information was still fresh. We were still ascertaining that information and we provided it within about an hour of that press conference. The opportunistic tactics of the member for Dawesville to try to insert himself into the public narrative simply for cheap political purposes does him no credit and does the Western Australian public no credit.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members!

Mr R.H. COOK: The Leader of the Opposition said that we are not out talking to the media enough. I am out there every day talking to the community. Yesterday, I did two press conferences to update the information as it became available. In the media this morning I was criticised for providing too much information. Other members of the media are saying I am not providing enough, so perhaps I am getting it just right. We will continue to provide information to the public as we come across this information and can provide it in an appropriate way that continues to allow for the investigations around contact tracing for these patients and make sure that members of the community get that information. A public information campaign is rolling out at the moment, ensuring that we can continue to drive that information out to the community. We were waiting for the federal government to join us in that, but it is taking a little while longer, so the Premier made the decision to go out earlier and get the ball rolling. We are continuing to work to provide information to the community.

The member for Central Wheatbelt quizzed us about other emergency services. We are working in lock step with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and St John Ambulance, and I spoke with Michelle Fyfe just the other day, who said that it is ready to work with the government to ensure that it can protect patients and its workers to make sure that we are all in a position as a community to address the impact of this virus outbreak.

As I said at the beginning, this is one of those moments in all our political lives when we make a decision: are we going to try to insert ourselves into the daily narrative, to try to keep ourselves in the limelight to score a cheap political opportunistic point or will we bring respect to the chamber, and demonstrate some maturity and leadership in the debate? I put on the record, and I am sure members on the other side will not mind, that we are providing regular briefings to the member for Dawesville and the Leader of the Opposition, and we provide those to other members of Parliament and leaders of political parties as they are requested. We will continue to provide that information because we are in this together. This motion does members opposite no credit, and they really need to

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closely examine the way they are conducting themselves. I must say that perhaps the member for Dawesville should listen to the bit of advice that occasionally comes through his Facebook feed. One person responded to his post and said —

For God's sake man stop talking the place down.

Another member of his Facebook community said —

I think these daily updates are doing a great job at keeping us not only informed, but advised.

Clearly, not everyone on the member for Dawesville's social media activity shares his enthusiasm for his political tactics. Members, the government is doing a great job. We are served well by the Chief Health Officer and his team. I am immensely proud of the work they have done, and together we should be standing to support them in the role they play.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park — Treasurer) [4.17 pm]: I would have thought that that response from the Minister for Health outlined very well exactly what the government has been up to. I note that in the Leader of the Opposition's contribution she accused the government of a "gross lack of action". I hope she is now educated. I hope she has learnt something, because she should not use as a measure—something that the member for Dawesville described as being on the edge of a global event—the number of media statements a government puts out as a response. I get that this is not the Leader of the Opposition's natural theatre, but that was one of the more woeful performances I have seen from her, which I think she knows, and I think her colleagues know that this motion does her no service. The Leader of the Opposition has been dealt with by the Premier and the Minister for Health. Apparently, because media statements have not been of sufficient quality and we have not taken out adverts for those who do not watch adverts at a sufficient level, the government is therefore not doing enough. The shadow Treasurer, unsurprisingly, pulled out a Qantas brochure that said that international flights will be declining. I do not think anybody should be surprised by that. But to accuse the government of having its head in the sand on the economy, from a person who at no point while in cabinet saw state final demand grow, and at no point during the second term of the former government saw domestic economic growth or employment growth, and to suggest for a minute that our government has done nothing but focus on returning the economy to growth and focus on jobs for Western Australia, is just outrageous and does members opposite a disservice. It is interesting to note that every demand that the shadow Treasurer put to the government in the media statement he put out yesterday was on policies that we have implemented, and every one of those policies he criticised, complained about and opposed. But he wants more of that—more of the policies that he opposed along the way. When the member for Bateman does not stand for anything, he ends up exposed to the fallacy of his argument, similarly with the Leader of the Opposition.

When we came into this place a couple of weeks ago, well after China made its move around flights and its own population, and the Premier was outlining the likely impact of coronavirus, the member for Bateman interjected and said, "That's your spin around coronavirus." Yet two weeks later, he is in here criticising the government for not doing enough. Give me a break! Interestingly, out of all those opposite, the better contribution was made by the Leader of the Nationals WA. The Liberal Party embarrassed itself today. The Leader of the Nationals WA posed a couple of good questions around the provision of services into regional Western Australia that the Minister for Health responded to quite clearly. I think some of the problem is not so much a lack of information but that there is so much going on globally, and that is confusing. The Leader of the Nationals WA said—I wrote this down—that there is confusion in the medical profession as well. I think that is probably right. As somebody who is not a medical expert but who is trying to extract from the Australian Medical Association and others things that I can put to my constituents, I do not think the president of the AMA has covered himself in glory on this. I think his comments have been unhelpful. They contradict what the AMA had on its website. Thankfully, the government has been assisted by other members of the AMA, who are perhaps a bit more level-headed around this debate, and we will continue to engage with those members.

When I look over to the other side of the chamber, I do not think that any members of the Liberal Party are supporting this motion. I think they are embarrassed by what they have done here today. They should be. This is one of those things that comes along very, very rarely. The government is doing all it can. The Premier and the Minister for Health outlined exactly what we have been doing. At question time I outlined some \$700 million in economic stimulus. I will continue to work with Josh Frydenberg around how we might continue to assist that. All I know for sure is that the shadow Treasurer will complain about every lever we pull along the way, as he has always done.

Amendment to Motion

Mr B.S. WYATT: I move —

To insert after "coronavirus" —

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 10 March 2020]
p1062g-1073a

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and now that has been outlined, acknowledge the government's timely response to this serious community concern

Division

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (35)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr M. Hughes	Mr P. Papalia	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr S.J. Price	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms J. Farrer	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Ms S.E. Winton
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr S.A. Millman	Ms C.M. Rowe	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr D.R. Michael (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr T.J. Healy	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms J.J. Shaw	

Noes (18)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Dr D.J. Honey	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Ms L. Mettam	Mr P.J. Rundle
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup	Dr M.D. Nahan	Mr A. Krsticevic (<i>Teller</i>)
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.C. Nalder	
Mrs A.K. Hayden	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

Pair

Ms E.L. Hamilton

Mr R.S. Love

Amendment thus passed.

Motion, as Amended

The SPEAKER: The question is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Division

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (36)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr M. Hughes	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms J.J. Shaw
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr P. Papalia	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr S.J. Price	Mr C.J. Tallentire
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Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms J. Farrer	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr M.J. Folkard	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr S.A. Millman	Ms C.M. Rowe	Mr B.S. Wyatt
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Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr D.C. Nalder	
Mrs A.K. Hayden	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr K.M. O'Donnell	

Pair

Ms E.L. Hamilton

Mr R.S. Love

Question thus passed.