

CORONAVIRUS — POST-QUARANTINE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Statement

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [6.30 pm]: In my second term, I have chosen to selectively make members' statements rather than set a record as I attempted to do in my first term. I want to make it very, very clear that there are absolutely no partisan politics in this matter at all. In fact, I am seeking to try to divine a solution to a problem. It is probably a problem that can be unpicked between jurisdictions and perhaps also involve the private sector to some degree. I have been a little reluctant to raise the issue because it involves a friend of mine, but because it also affects dozens of other Western Australians, I have chosen to bring it to the attention of the house. I want to make it very clear that the Minister for Police's office is also aware of this situation. My previous experience with that office on COVID matters, border matters and seeking clarification around arrangements has been extraordinarily helpful. My compliments, once again, go to the staff in Minister Papalia's office.

The issue I wish to address in the time available is one that is emerging in the Howard Springs quarantine facility in the Northern Territory. Dozens of Western Australians, and potentially up to 50, are presently serving out the final days of their mandatory quarantine period, which should come to its conclusion, I understand, on 4 December. I might get some of the details slightly incorrect, although I have attempted to make sure they are accurate, so I will go there very sparingly. The nub of the issue is that each of these Western Australians has a plan to transit through that quarantine facility and return to Western Australia on Saturday. Their capacity to do that, however, has been imperilled by the decision taken by major airlines in this country not to schedule the Darwin to Perth service on Saturday, 4 December. There is a service on 3 December, which, unfortunately, will happen before they fulfil their quarantine period, and one on 5 December. The service on 5 December is problematic because there is a 12-hour grace period between leaving a quarantine facility—leaving a green zone—and boarding a flight to enter Western Australia.

These Western Australians have sought permission—I reinforce that they are paying for this privilege—from the Northern Territory government, which manages the facility, to stay for an additional evening so that they do not, potentially, breach this regulation and then be obligated, if they are granted a G2G PASS to re-enter Western Australia, to serve another two weeks' quarantine after they have already served two weeks. This is effectively the dilemma they are in. Unfortunately, the advice from the authorities, the management of the Howard Springs quarantine facility, has been inconsistent and inaccurate, so absolutely no clear guidance has been provided to these people about their capacity to stay in quarantine at their own volition, out of necessity really, for an additional night. I also understand that those authorities have had another issue to deal with today. However, this has been building up over some time. As of about 2.30 or three o'clock this afternoon, this group had not been provided with sufficient clarity.

There are solutions to this issue, and they are threefold. The most desirable would be for the Northern Territory authorities, as it relates to the management of the Howard Springs facility, to provide more clarity and certainty to our Western Australian brothers and sisters who are currently serving their quarantine period. Another alternative is to compel commercial corporate Australia, particularly the airlines, to reconsider their decision to cancel the 4 December service from Darwin to Perth. The third alternative is the one I am seeking clarity on. This is not a performance; rather, I am advising the house of an issue and attempting to seek a solution. Is it possible for the Western Australian authorities to take a more flexible view of a cohort of Western Australians returning to Western Australia after they have served their two-week quarantine period in the Northern Territory when, for reasons beyond their control, they have had to spend time outside the so-called green zone before they can re-enter Western Australia?

I cannot possibly know the circumstances of every individual involved in this issue, so I am guarded against making broad, sweeping statements, but I think it is a reasonable assumption that each of those people has been double vaccinated, they have not been mixing with the broader community in the Northern Territory and they are all likely to be COVID-negative before they are allowed to board a plane to Western Australia. In my very humble view as a human being, not as a medical practitioner, and certainly not as one who enjoys executive authority and the privileges and responsibilities that come with that, should those other two options that I have identified fall over, would there be some means to be more flexible and nimble with our arrangements in this jurisdiction, especially since we are on the cusp, in the Premier's words, of reconnecting with Australia and the world?

I hope I am in a position to advise the house tomorrow evening of the progress in this case. I reinforce that I can only but raise the issue in an attempt to connect some of the dots and proffer some potential solutions, but the actual means of remediating this issue are obviously beyond my capacity as a member of the Western Australian opposition. I hope that the people who have the ability to implement rules, to be flexible and to show judgement, compassion and reason might be compelled to do so in this instance. I do not know whether it is online, but if members want a synopsis of this matter, I advise them to listen to a radio interview that my friend Kate McInnes did with Nadia Mitsopoulos this morning on ABC radio that sets out the circumstances very eloquently. I hope to be in a position to advise members of a happier, or at least a more certain, outcome tomorrow evening.