

PREMIER'S STATEMENT

Consideration

Resumed from 15 February on the following question —

That the Premier's Statement be noted.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [12.20 pm]: Before I begin, I also wish to extend the opposition's sincere condolences to the member for Maylands on her loss. We are all thinking of you and the extended family.

I would also like to acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, as I rise to speak to the Premier's Statement for the beginning of the 2022 parliamentary year.

Before I go any further, as I did yesterday, I would like to reiterate my thanks and admiration for the bushfire volunteers, the career firefighters and the people who have supported them over the last two weeks as fire has ravaged significant parts of our state. We are truly lucky to have so many who are willing to turn up and out when our communities need them to keep us safe. I have not yet been able to visit the communities of Denmark and Bridgetown—I know that Ravensthorpe and Hopetoun have also been impacted—but I have spent some time in my electorate and that of the member for Roe in the past week. In the wheatbelt, two fire fronts burned through large tracts of private property and nature reserves in enormously challenging conditions. There have been property losses and significant damage to sheds, fences and machinery. There has also been a devastating loss of livestock, a large number of which had to be destroyed after the fire. That is a truly devastating circumstance for anyone who has animals, and it will stay with those people who accompanied the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development officers for the rest of their lives.

The damage to the soil profile, which looks like a moonscape in many places, will be a challenge for many landowners for years to come. People who have spent time, effort and funds to build their soil to create an environment to grow their crops and to look after their land are facing a very tough journey in the weeks, months and years ahead. As someone who grew up in the wheatbelt and visibly recalls my own family responding to fires on our property and neighbours' properties, it has been distressing to hear from many experienced and long-term volunteers in these regions that these were the worst conditions they have ever experienced. Winds gusting and temperatures soaring into the 40s made it almost impossible to prevent the fast-moving fire front that was fuelled by remnants of the recent record harvest in the wheatbelt.

It is with grave concern that I report that at one stage, zero telecommunications were available. That left those in the path of the fire vulnerable and at risk. That included the entire town of Corrigin at one stage. It is unconscionable and unfathomable that in 2022, we still lose telecommunications during these emergency events. These issues relating to mobile telecommunications were raised after the Yarloop, Esperance and Wooroloo fires, and after cyclone Seroja, yet we still have a situation in which a fire front was bearing down on the town of Corrigin and there was no way of contacting anyone in the town to tell them to evacuate or prepare themselves. We have an enormous amount of gratitude for the firefighters. We are so lucky that no-one died. As the communities impacted take stock in the aftermath, I and my colleagues stand ready to assist in the recovery and rebuild, and to work with the local, state and commonwealth governments to ensure that everything that can be done is done in a timely manner.

We will continue to fight for a solution to these telecommunications issues that plague our regions. I can tell members that our communities have reached their limit. There is no place for finger-pointing between the state and the commonwealth. We have had that for too long. It is time for practical solutions. On that note, it is disappointing that we had the opportunity to learn from previous bushfires over the past 12 months, but this state government failed to prioritise a review into the Wooroloo bushfire, meaning there was no opportunity to apply lessons learnt from that event to the 2021–22 bushfire season. The serious challenges that we are facing, such as fighting bushfires in a COVID environment, maintaining mobile telecommunications in emergencies or managing recovery and assistance payments after a fire event, continue to be unaddressed. Likewise, this state government has failed to commit to an independent review into the response to and recovery from cyclone Seroja, something that is needed so we can learn from these types of events for the future.

I will move on to the Premier's Statement and address some of the issues raised as the McGowan government's priorities for the year ahead. On one thing we agree: for many, 2022 will be a year of inconvenience and disruption. For some, there will be sadness; for others, there will be relief. On that, the Premier and I agree. There are challenges ahead for our state, not least of which is that we have a government that seems to have wasted the precious time we have enjoyed over the last two years to prepare our state for living with COVID. The opposition acknowledges the goodwill and trust the Premier earned as the government navigated the early months and years of the state's path through the initial stages of the pandemic. Despite the claims from government, the opposition has supported many of the measures that were put in place to manage COVID-19. We passed legislation in a chamber very similar to the one that we are

sitting in and with a similar number of members that we have in the house right at this moment. We encouraged our constituents and Western Australians to get vaccinated, to get vaccinated again and to get boosted. We have supported mandates when there has been clear health advice to underpin these decisions. We, along with the community, did this because there was a pact—a level of trust—that if we did all these things, we would remain safe, we were protecting our fragile health system and we would eventually see these restrictions removed. Along with the community, we have depended on the Premier adhering to the health advice that is being provided by the Chief Health Officer and others who are working so hard to keep us safe. We expected honesty and transparency on these decisions.

Under emergency powers, in a pandemic, with a massive government majority, this is why we expect clear and transparent communication and justification for decisions that affect our lives and our livelihoods. That is why it is so disappointing that the Premier has failed on this account. Whether it is groundhog day or back to the future, it would appear that the Premier has only one setting for COVID management—that is, to lock everyone out and hope for the best. The twentieth of January, in a prime-time television slot, marks the day that the Premier broke the trust that he had earned over the last two years. Make no mistake: we in the opposition get courtside seats every day to the slick media machine of this government, but it went into overdrive on that day. It was a carefully stage-managed event to create a spectre of fear and urgency to justify a decision.

Western Australians who acknowledged the Premier's management of COVID for two years were instantly divided in their response. Relief and anger in equal measure flowed from all corners of the state. There would not be one member of Parliament who did not receive that communication from their constituency. There was relief from those who know our hospitals are underprepared and not ready for Omicron. There was anger from those who have done everything they have been asked to do—been vaccinated and followed mandates—with an expectation that we would move on from living in a state that is rapidly gaining a reputation that will be hard to shake. On that day, we were left in limbo. If we accept that more time was needed for boosters, we must also accept that it is not unreasonable to want to know the new target we are aiming for. But no health modelling has been released; no thresholds or trigger points have been communicated to which we can aim, and we have no detail about the days, weeks or months to come. We entered a holding pattern on that day, with a set of complex and incomprehensible rules that would change according to some mystery high case load number the Premier has refused to define.

On closer examination of the Chief Health Officer's advice and the feedback that has come from other experts across the nation and within Western Australia, it has become crystal clear that the Premier on that day started to depart from health advice and has let polling and political need dictate his decision-making. The polls are fickle, members. Just look at the poll in today's *The West Australian*. I have no doubt the Premier had polling in his back pocket to back his decision to halt the border reopening on 5 February. I am not doubting for one moment that the Chief Health Officer's advice to increase the percentage of people with their boosters is critical, but questions remain about why there was no new threshold set or new date announced. The government cannot avoid the fact that the scenarios outlined by the Chief Health Officer, along with a growing chorus of concerns being raised by business, the service industry and the community sector in the state, provide a compelling case for reopening sooner rather than later.

Why has the Premier or the Minister for Health not addressed the issue of waning immunity raised by the Chief Health Officer in his advice? Why has the Premier or the health minister not addressed the issue of Omicron cases peaking during the flu season as a result of delays to our border reopening? Why has the Premier or the health minister not acknowledged or addressed the concern raised by the Chief Health Officer that the recruitment of our much-needed health workforce is being hindered by closed borders and quarantine requirements? Why has the Premier or health minister not addressed the fact that there is a small window in which our hospital bed occupancy rates will be at optimal levels in March, April and May, and therefore a narrow window of opportunity, which we may miss, to peak Omicron cases and manage this carefully? These are real and valid questions raised by the Chief Health Officer in his advice that have never been answered satisfactorily by the Premier or the health minister. That has left us with uncertainty that is crippling our state's reputation as a stable and safe place to invest and work. We are left with a public that is becoming increasingly hostile and complacent towards COVID rules and regulations. That fatigue is seeping in and we are yet to see COVID numbers get anywhere close to what has been experienced in other states. We are left with a mishmash of rules and regulations that, it would appear, change on a whim. I need go no further than the proclamation from the Minister for Education and Training when she announced with such confidence that schools would be the first to open and the last to close, only to have an entire school shut down in the first week of term 1, or the Premier —

Ms S. Winton interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: One day!

Ms S.E. Winton: One school!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: One school, one day? How many schools now? How many times have the rules changed?

Ms S. Winton interjected.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Or the Premier —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Wanneroo, we are not entertaining interjections on the Leader of the Opposition's reply to the Premier's Statement.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: Thank you, Acting Speaker.

I refer to the Premier telling our universities, in person, to lock in semester 1 for the return of international students and then changing the plan, leaving many stranded overseas or with no option or no time to make their way back to our state to start in semester 1. He then changed the rules again, and yesterday changed the rules again! What about the blanket ban on school camps, with no consultation with school leadership, leaving many of our schools without options to provide this as an avenue for learning through the school year?

In the business community, we have seen small businesses bearing the brunt of mandates that need to be policed and managed. Rules were introduced with very little notice, were changed at short notice and, in the case of the hospitality and tourism industries, are causing challenges for staff on the front line dealing with disgruntled patrons. I urge everyone who goes into these businesses to act with good grace and to make sure they are not being abusive to the people working on the front line, who are simply trying to put in place the rules that have been provided by the government. It is not acceptable to abuse those people who are simply trying to do their job and do the right thing.

We have a brain drain with the bright, innovative, talented people we need for this state to thrive post-COVID leaving the state. That has already started and it will be very hard to reverse. Our reputation here in Western Australia has always been solid and stable but once broken it will take significant effort to repair. The decision by key business leaders to relocate to the eastern states is serious. What is the Premier doing to ensure these moves are not permanent, that more will not follow and that we will not lose those senior leaders that we need to help rebuild and replan our future living with COVID in Western Australia?

Unfortunately, for some, the border decision has been the straw that broke the camel's back. I note the Premier's consistent claims that the tourism sector has enjoyed the best couple of years it has ever had, but I also note that, for some, that is not true. Every time the Premier or the Minister for Tourism says that, it is like a stab in the heart for those who have suffered two of the most challenging years they have faced. Having just returned from the Kimberley and met with some of our major and smaller tourism operators, I can confirm that, with no confirmation of the date for Western Australia's borders to reopen, their entire 2022 season is in jeopardy, and that puts hundreds of jobs and the north west of our state and its economy in jeopardy.

One operator contacted me yesterday and advised that it had closed its Kimberley operations. RedSands Campers called me to say that it cannot sustain its Kununurra base any longer. If the decision to open the border had been honoured or at least a date had been provided in the last two weeks, it may have been able to survive, but it has been forced, as a small family business, to withdraw its operations in Kununurra. That will have a real impact on the offering that we have when the borders reopen. Its finances have been stretched, keeping staff on and working towards 5 February and it cannot do it any longer. It was heart-wrenching talking to these operators, all invested in the Kimberley, proud of what they have to offer and working to develop a product to showcase the jewel in the crown of not only Western Australia but Australia's tourism offering. They are at their wit's end, and when the Premier glibly states that tourism is booming, we have to note—not for everyone! It would not surprise me if there were more announcements from others in the tourism sector like those from RedSands Campers in coming days. I heard both the Premier and Minister for Health in Parliament yesterday talk about making decisions that impact the lives and livelihoods of Western Australians. Adam and his family are an example of those decisions impacting the lives and livelihoods of Western Australians. I urge the Premier—the opposition urges the Premier—to set a date and give these hardworking West Aussies the certainty they need. No amount of government compensation can make up for the losses they have sustained and the Premier's paralysis to set a date and provide a clear plan for WA living with COVID is harming their future and our state's future.

I turn now to the state's finances and confirmation that the McGowan government will deliver another record surplus this year. Quite frankly, as I sat and listened to the Premier boast of this surplus and employment and participation figures in yesterday's speech, I was appalled and concerned. This is a government awash with cash, and the Premier said that they have kept their financial powder dry. While that financial powder is dry, I point the Premier to the issues that his government is failing to address while sitting on these billions of dollars. I have a family of seven in my electorate that is on the cusp of homelessness. They are not the only ones. I feel utterly helpless as I know it is useless to direct them to the department of housing because its waitlist is bulging with people who have been on it far longer than this family. They are good tenants. They are in a private rental, and there is simply nowhere for them to go. That story is repeated across the state. The Minister for Housing can point to the handful of modular homes, but it is a drop in the ocean compared with what is needed. This government has failed to plan and failed to invest. We are now left with zero vacancies and waiting lists as long as your arm. Homelessness is becoming a real prospect for more and more Western Australians. That is a tragedy in a state as wealthy as ours.

I also do not recall the level and frequency of blackouts being so dire since Labor's Eric Ripper was in charge of Western Power. Sustained blackouts and brownouts, massive disruption to industry and enormous inconveniences to householders have become par for the course for some residents, particularly in regional communities. Power charges for households and businesses mean that we could rightly expect a gold-standard service. I have to say that in regional WA especially, it is far from that. Over summer, when temperatures soared to 53 degrees in some parts of the state and the fire danger index was high, thousands of people across our state were left with no power for days and sometimes weeks. Perth got a taste of what many of our regional communities battle with constantly—no air conditioning and no fans, fridges or freezers. It is utterly unconscionable that in a state as wealthy as Western Australia, we have a situation like this. In country communities, power can be linked to water pipes for livestock; mobile telecommunications towers, which have poor battery backup; and other essential services. In 2022, we have a right to expect better from a government that is awash with cash. In 2022, after five years of the McGowan government and the delivery of massive surpluses, you would think that this would be a problem of the past, but not under this government's watch.

Likewise, we know that our health system has been under-resourced. In regional communities, critical staff shortages and a lack of resources mean that hospitals will be forced to reduce services or temporarily close if staff are exposed to COVID-19. We caught a glimpse of this in the midwest, where the WA Country Health Service has already started this by stealth. It was with great concern that the member for Moore and Martin Aldridge, member for Agricultural Region, were drawn to an issue that was raised in Three Springs, where the community had caught wind of plans for five elderly residents to be moved from North Midlands Health Service in Three Springs across to Morawa. That is 50 kilometres away. Conversations had already started with residents about how they would move and what they could take with them to Morawa, as I understand it. I understand that this has now been halted, but there has been radio silence from the government on how regional cases of COVID will be managed, whether hospital protocols have been improved, whether testing has been put in place or how staffing shortages will be addressed in a state that is very sparsely populated in regional areas. There are grave concerns in communities about what this will mean for them as COVID continues to progress.

In addition, the government's election commitment to Geraldton has collapsed, as the multimillion-dollar redevelopment has been indefinitely delayed. It has been delayed three times since 2017, and no tender has been awarded for stage 2 of this project and no completion date has been published. The woes of our tertiary hospitals have been well canvassed by the shadow Minister for Health, the member for Vasse. We have had a record number of code yellows, record ambulance ramping, staff at breaking point across the system, cover-ups and serious clinical and cultural issues plaguing a system that the Premier and the Minister for Health tell us is ready to deal with COVID and Omicron. Those issues were so serious that the Premier sacked the previous health minister to install a new and inexperienced minister in his place as we head into perhaps the biggest challenge that our health system will face.

The Minister for Community Services is also presiding over a ticking time bomb in her department. On Sunday, 30 January, the headline in *The West Australian* of "Department of Communities: Racism allegations, fraud and staff worked to breaking point" was hardly a glowing reference for the McGowan government after five years at the helm. The article refers to Tania, which is not her real name, a former employee who had resigned from the department in 2019 citing that after 12 years in the role, workloads had become so bad that she no longer felt she knew the children she was meant to make life-altering decisions about. There are also internal reports exposing widespread cultural problems within the department and warning that racism is wide scale and endemic. A cultural values assessment was conducted that surveyed 1 862 employees on what they were experiencing in their workplace, and the department was given a score of 13 out of 100. This department is responsible for our most vulnerable children and young people. What an absolutely shocking assessment by those who work in this system! Let us not forget that this is one of the McGowan government's mega-departments, with five different ministers listed as being responsible for the department: Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Housing, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Youth and Minister for Emergency Services; Volunteering. It is clearly a failed experiment and a debacle. It is leaving those who work in the system burnt out and disenfranchised and is putting at risk those who are already in vulnerable positions.

Youth crime, particularly in the north west and the Kimberley, has blown up and is out of control. I note the petition that the member for North West Central presented to the house today from Carnarvon in the Gascoyne. I also note the Premier's announcement yesterday that funding and resources will be sent north to deal with this complex and wicked problem. I have sat in this chamber and heard the member for North West Central ask questions about law and order, in particular youth crime, in his electorate and across the north of the state. The response from the Minister for Police and others was to dismiss it: "Nothing to see here." Let me take members back to a question asked by the member for North West Central directly to the Minister for Police on 14 October last year. He said —

I refer to the unacceptable level of crime and antisocial behaviour across regional Western Australia.

- (1) What is the government doing about the serious crime wave that is gripping the heart of Fitzroy Crossing, as residents are living in fear and surrendering their streets to gangs and young troublemakers?

I will not read the minister's full response. I could. There is a defence of the police officers, and we have no qualms with the police officers, who are doing an extraordinary job on the beat in these communities. They are the last line of defence in many cases and are under the pump. This is how the Minister for Police chose to answer the question from the member for North West Central —

I am at a loss as to where the member sources the questions he asks me ... Sadly, crime is a constant presence in all communities and it is no different in Western Australia. I am not sure what the member is talking about. If he wants to ask a specific question about an incident, an offence or a report and he wants me to respond to that, I am happy to respond.

It was dismissed. The member asked a number of other questions that were in the same vein and they were dismissed. They were referred to as inappropriate —

Mr V.A. Catania: Divisive.

Ms M.J. DAVIES: — divisive and not something that should be raised in the manner that the member was raising them. Having been to the north west, Carnarvon and the Kimberley in the last three weeks and having met with people in those communities, I can attest that they are utterly fed up, that those questions accurately reflect the concerns of the communities and that they have been crying out for help from this government.

On the back of a series of meetings and persistent work to highlight the concerns of the communities by the opposition, and a series of meetings that were spearheaded by Hon Neil Thomson, the member for Mining and Pastoral Region, and Vince Catania, the member for North West Central, we now see the Premier shifting attention and escalating the response of government to these very serious issues. Do I think it is a coincidence that the Premier has staked a claim on dealing with youth crime in the Kimberley? No, I do not, because I think this is a Premier with a glass jaw and an eye to the front page of the daily newspaper and polling. Do I think it is time the government actually paid attention to these issues? Absolutely. The stories our team heard from the communities in the north of our state were about what can be described only as communities that are currently lawless. They are their words. Some of those personal stories were horrifying. They are indeed communities in crisis. That does not mean that there are not solutions. There are. In the Shire of Halls Creek, great work is being done on a community-led response to these issues. The local government has stepped into the breach, where state government agencies have been unable to gain traction, where too often the police have been left as the last line of defence, where funding for non-government organisation contracts does not meet the specific community need and where government workers, no matter how committed they are—we know they are—are on the clock from morning till sundown and are not available when the real trouble starts.

Quite frankly, this government has ignored this issue until it has reached crisis point, and there are some very hard yards ahead. Our team is willing to stand beside those communities and work on the solutions that they are asking for. I welcome the fact that the Premier and his government are no longer dismissing the concerns that are being raised by these communities.

It is just as well that an effort is being made to work on keeping these young people out of the justice system, which is something we all want, because it has emerged that Banksia Hill Detention Centre has become yet another victim of this government's neglect. That neglect is impacting those who are incarcerated and the staff who work in the system. Department of Justice director general Adam Tomison was candid in his response to the media last week when it was reported that the centre was dealing with acute staffing shortages. His response was —

“Usually about it's about 60-plus staff who run a shift inside Banksia Hill ...

“Depending on what goes on that day, we may be down to around 30 staff, [which] would be a bad day.

According to Community and Public Sector Union—Civil Service Association of WA Secretary Rikki Hendon, her members have been telling her that Banksia Hill is chronically short staffed and that 30 is a bad day and 26 is an appalling day. In an article published by the ABC's Emma Wynne on 11 February, Ms Hendon is quoted as saying —

“It's really desperately unsafe for both staff and for the young people.”

This is a government that pledged to keep us safe. This is a government that has amassed a record surplus. Yet when it comes to the basics of running government, this is a government that is failing.

As we open the debate for 2022, it would be remiss of me as the member for Central Wheatbelt not to mention the agricultural industry. Our grain sector has had a record-breaking harvest of 21.3 million tonnes received through Co-operative Bulk Handling Ltd. That surpasses the previous record in 2016–17 of 16.65 million tonnes and is 50 per cent more than the five-year average of 14 million tonnes. This industry is very good at doing more with less.

It does more with technology when telecommunications are working. It does more with limited rain. It does do more with a limited workforce. It has not been missed by this sector that the government has been missing in action when it comes to support for workforce challenges. The time and attention that has been poured into our mining sector has been absent even on a minor scale when it came to finding real solutions for the agricultural sector, which generates a significant dollar for our state's economy and supports small and large businesses and their employees. A pig-headed and ideological approach from the government has meant that we have been met with "employ locals" at every turn—at every turn. If there were locals to employ, they would have been on the tools.

The Premier stood here yesterday and spoke of record employment and participation rates. I commend and congratulate our broadacre farmers, pastoralists, horticulturists and all others in the agricultural industries for pulling out the stops. There are some exhausted and stretched people out there, and with no date for the borders to reopen, these issues will continue to be a challenge. It is a seasonal sector. The glib response from those who have no connection or understanding of this sector, pointing to the record harvest, undermines the mental and physical fatigue and the stress that farmers have been under while trying to maximise favourable seasonal conditions and prices. Perhaps there is no better example of the spin and rhetoric that this Premier and government has made an art form out of than the comment yesterday relating to royalties for regions. The Premier stated —

We have retained and improved ... royalties for regions ...

Can I draw members' attention to the priorities of royalties for regions under the former Liberal–National government in its first six months, when it was a fund of just \$644 million. We were elected and upon election we created the fund. In doing so, we committed to the following things in the first six months: an immediate commitment to upgrade the Kalgoorlie hospital; an immediate boost to the Royal Flying Doctor Service after former Labor minister Jim McGinty referred to it as nothing more than an interest group; a country local government fund designed to deliver local priorities and decentralise decision-making for critical infrastructure and projects; a long overdue boost to patient assisted travel scheme funding; an upgrade to Nickol Bay Hospital in Karratha to boost obstetric services, to build new staff accommodation and to develop a blueprint for the health services that the Pilbara deserved, which we later delivered in full; a significant boost for community resource centres; an investment to expand Ord Stage 2, which was matched by the Rudd Labor government; funding to boost exploration in the mining sector to keep the pipeline of projects coming; the creation of the Country Age Pension Fuel Card; and significant funds toward the Pilbara revitalisation plan. In six months we had created that fund and set about delivering a decentralised and truly unique regional development program that has delivered a lasting legacy. That program is no more under this government. You may say it, Premier, but not one person in regional Western Australia believes it, and that is to the detriment of our entire state, because without our regions flourishing and thriving, our state cannot flourish and thrive.

We have had five years of this McGowan Labor government. My question for the house and for the people of Western Australia is: what has it actually delivered? Sitting on a massive budget surplus, this government has presided over a health system in crisis; a rapidly escalating housing crisis; rolling blackouts across the state; disintegration and dysfunction in a department responsible for our most vulnerable children and young people; and the dismantling of our state's only regional development program. It has, in one fell swoop, with a poll run from a minister's office, ended the native forestry industry, leaving businesses and employees with no choice other than to accept an inadequate transition package that will do nothing more than give the Minister for Forestry the chance to spruik to his union mates. The government has been dragged kicking and screaming to deal with youth crime and dysfunction in our state's north, denying that there was an issue until there was no option other than to admit that it needed do better. This is a government that has ripped regional representation from the Parliament using a massive majority that was gifted by the people of Western Australia to recognise the Premier's management of COVID and nothing more.

Now we are at a crossroads, needing leadership and certainty as we face COVID in our community. Our success and freedoms of the last two years are a mixture of government decision-making, hard work from the people of Western Australia, environmental factors and plain old good luck. I do not deny that we have enjoyed freedoms that others have not, but as the world moves on, we must also have a clear plan for living with COVID. Gone is the Premier with the mantra to "crush and kill the virus". What we now have is a Premier who is paralysed with indecision, and is unwilling to share information or data, or how decisions will be made. He is flip-flopping on complex rules that leave the community confused and sceptical. This is a government that is fast losing the trust it earned because it is not being open and honest. It is not delivering on the Premier's promise of 2017 to lead a government with a commitment to rolled-gold transparency.

When we peel back the layer of spin and rhetoric, we find that this is a government that has delivered very little and failed to prioritise the basic tasks of a state government—health, education, housing, keeping our children safe and keeping the power on. Our national and international reputation is in tatters. We have a record surplus and the government had a massive electoral majority, but there are fires in every portfolio. Soon there will be no daily press conferences in which decisions can be deflected to the Chief Health Officer or the Commissioner of Police.

This government has failed not only to prepare the state for living with COVID, but also to deliver on the basics that a state government is responsible for. That is why I move the following amendment.

Amendment to Question

Ms M.J. DAVIES: I move —

That the following words be added after “noted” —

and that this house condemns the McGowan government for betraying the trust of Western Australians, making decisions based on politics, not science, and leaving Western Australia indefinitely locked away from the rest of the world

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [12.58 pm]: I rise to strongly support the amendment. To the member for Maylands, I offer my deepest sympathies to you.

Before the Premier leaves the chamber, I wish to make a statement in this Parliament about the utter unacceptability of the public threats that have been made against him and his staff. That is utterly unacceptable. I condemn those completely. I hope that the full force of the law applies to the people who do that. You know you have our absolute support in that matter.

I am very happy to rise to make this contribution because a great misfortune has befallen a Premier who enjoyed an historic victory at a global level in any democracy and who had an unparalleled level of support after a remarkable election victory in the history of Australian states. The Premier had the trust of the people of Western Australia, yet he has completely undermined that trust by the decision he made on 20 January to back-pedal on the promise, the commitment, he made to the people of Western Australia that he would open the borders.

I want to take members of this chamber through the background health information that the Premier had to hand when he made that decision. I am not going to interpret the health information; I am going to read out the evidence that was provided by the Chief Health Officer. I will also directly quote from an article by Josh Zimmerman, who did an excellent job of investigating the other references that the Chief Health Officer referred to and on consulting other experts. I will read the excerpts verbatim; I will not read the entirety of the Chief Health Officer’s report. The Chief Health Officer gave the Premier the report on 19 January 2022. The first point I have drawn out is —

The two-dose vaccine efficacy against infection with the variant is estimated to be 4% overall, but this rises to 59–64% efficacy after a mRNA vaccine booster dose. Protection against severe disease is maintained after two doses at 80–90% but is further enhanced by a booster dose, which increases the protection to 95–98%, but both wane over time.

...

With regards to severity, there is between a 64–70% reduction in hospitalisation in comparison to Delta infection. ICU admission rates were also an estimated 75% lower. The risk of being admitted to hospital for Omicron cases is lower for those who had received 2 doses of a vaccine (65% lower) compared to those who had not received any vaccination. The risk of being admitted to hospital for Omicron cases was lower still among those who had received 3 doses of vaccine (81% lower). The length of stay in hospital was also less, estimated at 3–4 days compared to 8 days previously.

...

The Omicron variant is a very different disease to Delta and, once established, can only be suppressed, not eliminated. After considering the factors outlined above, opening of the border on 05 February 2022 is expected to lead to a major outbreak in WA that would peak in an estimated 60 days and potentially much sooner if there was an increased number of introduced cases.

The advice notes —

Reporting in Europe has indicated that influenza has returned at higher than expected rates from mid-December 2021. Given the opening of the international and interstate borders, WA can expect a significant influenza season in 2022, which may arrive early, given increased susceptibility in the population and circulating strains in the northern hemisphere. Other respiratory viruses, particularly Respiratory Syncytial Virus, which may produce severe illness in very young children, are also expected to return. Any decision on opening dates should consider the potential for twin outbreaks if the peak or post peak period is expected to fall in the winter influenza season.

The advice notes —

Hospital occupancy is also typically best in the months of February, March and April.

...

WA is expected to get to a booster coverage of 35% of the eligible population by 05 February and 75% by 02 March 2022 on present booster trends.

I will now refer to excerpts from Mr Zimmerman's article —

As of January 27, over 70s had already hit 62.4 per cent coverage. An average 4381 third doses—equivalent to around 1.6 per cent of the total cohort—have been administered each day this month.

That places WA on track to hit 90 per cent coverage by Valentine's Day, although the rollout in over 70s would be expected to slow marginally in coming days as the proportion of people eligible for the jab declines.

...

Research by the UK Health Security Agency found protection against symptomatic disease caused by the Omicron variant began to fade within five weeks of a booster shot being administered, dropping from an initial 65 to 75 per cent down to 45 to 50 per cent by the 10-week mark.

Protection against hospitalisation dropped from 92 per cent shortly after being boosted to 83 per cent 10-weeks after a third dose.

...

University of Western Australia professor George Milne, an expert in infectious disease modelling, this week released his own Omicron findings which found that by February 5, WA would reach "a level of immunity in the population that it's harder to get higher than".

"Therefore, it doesn't make much difference if we hold the borders closed for very much longer, actually," Prof Milne said.

...

Australia-wide, 2545 of all deaths caused by COVID—or 81 per cent—have been among people aged 70 and over. That grows to 92 per cent for people aged 60 and over.

What does that all mean? Global experience has shown that the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is highly infectious but it is much less virulent than previous variants. We know that Omicron is already present in the WA community and spreading. The relatively low testing rate means that the reported case numbers will almost certainly be lower than the actual cases, and the Chief Health Officer has said that it is impossible to stop the spread of Omicron once it enters the state. The Chief Health Officer mentioned that global experience has shown that Omicron infections increase rapidly, but peak at around 60 days and then decline.

The major health issue with COVID is that it kills older people—92 per cent of deaths from COVID in Australia were people over 60 years of age. Hence, this is the group we need to protect most in order to manage the health system and to prevent deaths. The vaccines are far less effective against the Omicron variant than people intuitively believe—that is the double dose. The mRNA booster affords significant protection against serious illness, but, importantly, its effectiveness wanes quite rapidly, over months, not years. Over months, we see a substantial reduction in the effectiveness of the mRNA booster.

The most vulnerable cohort in our community—that is, people over 70—have high rates of vaccination, with over 90 per cent now having had their booster shots, as I understand it. It is best, as was indicated by the Chief Health Officer, to have a peak infection rate when hospitals have their lowest caseloads. In WA, that is between February and April. It is utter madness to delay the border opening so that it corresponds with the winter flu season, which is expected to be worse than a normal year. Omicron is here and we cannot stop it. It is best to allow the Omicron peak to occur while we have the best hospital capacity. Given the peak for hospitalisation occurs in around 60 days, if we were to project 60 days forward to the time that our hospitals would have the greatest capacity, opening the border between last December and February would have been the best time. The best time for vaccination protection for vulnerable people is now. The cohort of people aged over 60 years have maximum protection now.

The border opening was delayed to prevent an Omicron outbreak, as occurred in New South Wales and Victoria. Given that Omicron is already here, that horse has bolted. We are likely approaching infection rates that would have occurred if the border had been opened on 5 February, because we see exponential growth in the rate of infections. I find it dumbfounding that the Premier and Minister for Health can in any conscious way delay the opening of the border when every bit of evidence they have to hand states that that will lead to a worse health outcome for the people of Western Australia, particularly those people in the vulnerable cohort. Those people got their vaccinations in November; I got my vaccination back in November. Those people who are most at risk got their vaccinations early, and those people are now heading to four months since they received that vaccination, and that means the efficacy of that vaccination is waning. Yes, there may be a steady increase in the third-dose vaccinations—that is, the booster dose—for younger people in the population, but as is very clear from the Chief Health Officer's advice, they are not the people who are largely at risk. There will be some disease and serious illness in that cohort.

However, overwhelmingly the threat of serious illness and death is in the older cohort, and their immunity is now waning. Delaying the opening of the border is a pyrrhic exercise. We should open the border and apply the testing, tracing, isolation, quarantine, public health and social measures required to control the rate of transmission. Western Australia has excellent practice in that. The people of Western Australia have done the right thing by this government and have shown themselves to be very compliant with the rules.

There are various ways the border opening can be done. Clearly, there are opportunities to do it in a way that minimises risk. As I said, it will minimise the risk of overwhelming our health system in the worst part of the year and, through conscious decisions of the government, the Omicron peak will coincide with the peak of an influenza season that is expected to be far worse than last year. Last year, the flu season was quite muted because of closures and lockdowns around the world. That means that people's natural immunity against the flu has declined quite dramatically.

The McGowan Labor government had a contract with the people of Western Australia. The government said, "Get vaccinated, get the booster dose and obey the rules and we will open the border on 5 February." I want to tackle the comments the government and the Minister for Health have made about the impact of Omicron and the decision by the Premier on 20 January to backflip on his commitment. The Premier said that it was because something new happened and there was a new disaster, but let us deal with the facts. The fact is that Omicron was detected in South Africa and then around the world in November 2021. National cabinet met on 30 November 2021—the Chief Medical Officer, Paul Kelly, was at that meeting—to discuss the initial assessment of Omicron. The assessment was that it appeared to be much more transmissible and at that stage there was a suspicion that it was far less virulent. The McGowan announcement on the border closure date was 13 December—a fortnight later. The morphology of Omicron was known about in this state. The Premier suggested that suddenly new information had come out about Omicron. The fact is that the Premier, the Chief Health Officer, the Minister for Health and others had access to information from around the world on Omicron but said that suddenly new information had come to hand when it was known that Omicron was much more infectious and much less virulent than the Delta strain and the earlier strains of COVID-19. The truth is that the Premier had an informed contract with the people of Western Australia. The people of Western Australia stuck to their part of the contract, but the McGowan government bailed on that contract and cancelled it. Why? It did not do it because suddenly it had new information about Omicron; it did it because the Premier was playing to the public gallery and playing to popularity. However, the Premier and the health minister have seriously underestimated the people of Western Australia on that. The reality is that they have broken the trust of the people of Western Australia with that backflip. It was driven by perceived politics and not science.

Why would the public of Western Australia believe anything going forward that this Premier and health minister have to say? I believe we are seeing that. I believe that one of the impacts of that is the low testing rate of people in this state. Up until this point, Western Australians have been enormously compliant. However, the people of Western Australia have said that they had a contract with the government and the government said it would open the border. The government said it would let families reunite. Recently, the government has made much about opening the state border and reducing the quarantine period. However, I have spoken to dozens of families. Thirty per cent of Western Australia's population are immediate migrants from overseas, or one generation further on. They have a large number of family members. I have spoken to mothers who have had babies and have been unable to have their own mother be with them. I spoke with a beautiful young woman who had a toddler who had never seen a grandparent. The woman had a miscarriage but her mother was not allowed into the state to comfort her. That is an absolute disgrace and that is not an isolated story.

[Leave denied for the member's time to be extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: The restrictions on families reuniting is an absolute travesty and disgrace. The limit of 500 on overseas visitors coming into Western Australia is an absolute disgrace. The arbitrary limit of 500 people coming in from overseas in effect means that many of them cannot come because airlines are not flying into the state when they have only a handful of potential passengers who can enter the state. Western Australians want to rejoin the rest of Australia properly and they want to rejoin the world. It is time for this Premier to set a date, and that date must be soon. As we on this side of the chamber have said, the Premier needs to set a date before 5 March. If the Premier does not open up this state to the rest of the world and allow that Omicron peak to occur before the winter flu season, he will be putting the lives of Western Australians at risk.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central) [1.16 pm]: I rise to support the amendment that the Leader of the Opposition has moved because what we are seeing the Premier do here is like buying a new vehicle. He has gone and bought a new car from the dealer, but he did not expect it to lose its value so quickly after two years. The repayments are worth more than the car. That is what is happening to the Premier. He has lost 30 per cent and it will continue. The people of Western Australia thought they bought a brand new Hyundai and they thought the value would last. But, clearly, that value is disappearing because they cannot trust the vehicle; they cannot trust the Premier. It is all about fear. He is a one-trick pony. They thought the car was four-wheel drive, all-terrain—but no, it was only two-wheel drive. The people of Western Australia are angry. They are angry with the purchase they made

with the specs that were presented at the last state election. We have seen that time and again from this Premier. People's trust is being eroded and will continue to be eroded.

I refer back to when the Premier stood on the steps of Parliament House with the then Leader of the Opposition, Alan Carpenter, before he became Premier. I do not think any of the members of Parliament then are left in this house. The now Premier signed a piece of paper to say that he would give away his Western Australian parliamentary pension and that all members would come under the new scheme. He would get rid of the lucrative pension. He stood up and voted to get rid of it. He stood on the steps and said that he would hand it over, sign away his lucrative parliamentary pension, as Hon Alan Carpenter did. However, we found out that he did not do that. He is one of three members of Parliament left on the old superannuation scheme. The point is that we could not trust him then. He said one thing and did another. He said one thing for political advantage and did another to advantage him. That is the point the opposition is making here about legislation put before the house.

The Premier made commitments back in 2017 that he would protect subcontractors, yet the legislation that was brought in and passed did not protect subcontractors as the Premier said it would. The Premier said that changes to the Legislative Council's voting system would not occur; he said that it was not on the agenda, yet it was on the agenda, and that legislation has now been passed. We have seen these changes. Of course, the Premier also said that the border would open, but we all know what has happened: the border has not opened. That creates uncertainty and, as the tourism slogan puts it, we are like no other. We are like no other because we are the only state in Australia, and probably the only jurisdiction in the world, that is cut off from the rest of our own country with COVID inside. The only thing that can leave this state is COVID. The Premier has lost the trust of the people of Western Australia.

On education, as pointed out by the Leader of the Opposition, the Premier said that our schools would be the first to open and the last to close. That did not last long. What happened? We have seen closure after closure. The Premier has spoken about international relations and how important they are. He spoke about how the tourism minister under the previous government had not been to Japan or India since 2010 or 2011 and criticised the previous government for that. Well, our international relations are suffering because Western Australia is closed to the rest of the world. We are like no other. International relations are critical. Interstate relations are also critical when it comes to trade, and we are seeing businesses leave this state because of the uncertainty. They have had enough. Tourists are not willing to book holidays in WA because it is like no other; you book, you cancel, and you cannot come to Western Australia. Our tourism operators are desperate; they need certainty. The Premier has consistently said that our tourism industry has never been as good as it has been over the last two years. Well, that is a glass-half-full approach. He does not understand the tourism industry and where it sits.

I toured the Kimberley with the Leader of the Opposition and Hon Neil Thomson, MLC, and we met with tourism operators who are suffering because the border is shut. I think the Premier said, "Go and refinance. Go and look at your businesses and how you can refinance; redo your loans and borrow more money to survive." The businesses have done that, and they cannot keep doing it. They are at the point where they cannot keep borrowing and cannot refinance. In the Kimberley, for example, crime is out of control. In December 2020, before the last state election, the government held a big crime forum in Broome. It talked tough and yet, 12 months on, we are seeing crime escalate and the government is not doing a single thing. It was only pressure from the community and the opposition, which toured the Kimberley and held crime forums, that has pushed the government into a position of doing something, but the proof will be in the pudding. The government needs to provide the resources that our police need, because they are at their wit's end. They need resources to be able to continue to ensure that we have a safe community.

We have had to force the government to do things; this government is reactive. That means that it looks at focus groups and public opinion before it makes decisions. It is reactive rather than proactive. It is a one-trick pony. The government's seams are coming apart. The Leader of the Opposition highlighted the government's failures in housing and health. We hear about these COVID plans, but after touring the Kimberley, where the concern is that towns will potentially be cut off from the rest of Western Australia, it is apparent that people do not know what the COVID plan is.

The Minister for Health should not nod her head. Why does she not call or, better still, go and see the Aboriginal medical health service? It does not know what the COVID plan is. All it wants is support from the Department of Health to assist it in going door to door to get people vaccinated. It has requested that; the onus is back on the Aboriginal medical health service to provide support for people to get vaccinated, but the only way that will work will be for it to go from door to door. That is what it has asked for, but all we hear is crickets.

We hear all this tough talk about mandates. When the Attorney General was up in the Kimberley, everyone complained because he attended a funeral without wearing a mask. How does that work? Ministers are not following the mandates imposed by the government. Just today I went to the members' bar to buy a coffee and had to show proof of vaccination, but my understanding is that to be in this building, people have to show proof of vaccination to the Clerk. That is part of the craziness that is going on here. No-one knows what is going on. The people of Western Australia are confused. The polls are now showing how confused the people of Western Australia are, and how angry and

upset they are with the government's talk, which is all smoke and mirrors. We went into lockdown after one or two COVID cases, and we saw the effect that had on businesses. The government then announced support packages with no details; the details were released months and months afterwards. Businesses cannot operate that way.

We are now seeing that again. The Premier said that the border would reopen, but it continues to be shut. Businesses geared up and invested in anticipation of the border reopening; it was probably their last opportunity to invest in their business, because they accepted the Premier's word that he would reopen the border. They are now having to refund hundreds of thousands of dollars to people from the east who booked holidays in Western Australia.

Small businesses are bearing the brunt of being police officers when they have to check people's vaccination status, and they are suffering backlash from people who are getting annoyed. It is my understanding that the government is now not even listing exposure sites; is that correct, Minister for Health? We are seeing a relaxed approach from the government, yet it is placing an obligation on businesses to act as the government's police force. People are getting tired of that. Like the Leader of the Opposition, I urge everyone to have respect for people who have to check vaccination statuses; it is not their fault.

The people of Western Australia played their role. The Premier said, "Go get your first dose", and they did. He said, "Go get your second dose", and they did. He said, "Go get your third dose", and they are doing it. He said, "We will open up when we hit a vaccination rate of 90 per cent", and that is the rate the people of Western Australia achieved. The Premier has broken his word. It is much like buying a Hyundai and thinking it is a four-wheel drive but then finding out later that it is a two-wheel drive. That is what the people of Western Australia are now starting to find out. We have a two-wheel drive government that should be an all-terrain vehicle. We are seeing issues right throughout the government, whether in housing, health, crime or child protection. The government is falling apart because it is a one-trick pony. There is more to COVID in this state. The government needs to fix some of the problems it has created. There is a lack of investment. We have heard announcements about social housing receiving hundreds of millions of dollars, but we have not seen one social house built. That is adding to the problems that exist, whether it be crime or whether it will assist COVID spreading among the most vulnerable people in our Aboriginal communities in overcrowded towns like those in the Kimberley and Carnarvon, and the list goes on.

The Premier's popularity rating will continue to fall because the government has no answers. It has been too slow to turn around the sinking ship. That is what is happening over there; it is a sinking ship. The people of Western Australia need the border to reopen, as outlined by the member for Cottesloe, the Leader of the Liberal Party. It needs to be reopened in order to save lives and businesses need an assurance that the border will be reopened to save their businesses. The Premier needs to step up. If he is too tired and has had enough, perhaps it is time for him to move on. I am sure that the Minister for Health will make an excellent Premier—a fresh set of eyes that the government perhaps needs to deal with these crises. If we do not open up, we will not get the people needed to fill the vacancies in our health system, in the construction and resources sector, and in the small businesses and tourism sectors. We need people. We have gone through two years of pain, yet it seems like we are back at 2020 when it began, because our health system is not ready and we have a housing crisis and a crime crisis. Government departments are in crisis right across the government portfolios. What are we waiting for? We are now back at stage 1 because of the incompetence and arrogant behaviour of the government. The government says, "Don't question us, because we know what's right. Don't question us; we've got data or we're preparing data, but we won't release that data. We'll release it perhaps when we think that data suits our agenda and the decisions that we've made."

It is time to move on. The Premier and the government need to move on. That is not what we are seeing. Perhaps it is time to change the Premier if he is not listening to the people of Western Australia, because that is what is happening. Our tourism reputation has been shot, our reputation over east has been shot and our international relations have been tarnished because of the actions of this Premier, or because of his inaction by not reopening the borders and by not being open and accountable. In 2016, Hon Mark McGowan, the then Leader of the Opposition, ran at the election on having rolled-gold transparency if he formed government in 2017. He talked about being open and honest, and having rolled-gold accountability. Now we all know that that is not the case. The members for Carine, Nedlands, Churchlands, Warren–Blackwood, Bateman, Riverton, South Perth and Scarborough will not be around here in 2025. I imagine that a lot more members than that will follow them out the door, because the public of Western Australia thought they had bought a four-wheel drive Hyundai, but they got a two-wheel drive Premier who has lost 30 per cent of his value.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms A.E. Kent): Order, members!

Mr V.A. CATANIA: That is what the people of Western Australia got.

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [1.34 pm]: On behalf of the government, I rise to speak to the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I was somewhat surprised to see the member for North West Central goading government members when it did not bode well for the people who did that previously. I remember the former members for Churchlands and Dawesville in the last Parliament regularly standing and pointing the finger at Labor

members and giving us a lecture in grubby terms that we would not be here next time. Guess what? We are here and those members are not. I would tread with caution, member, when pointing the finger and using those kinds of tactics.

I have heard during the debate on the amendment to this question a lot of complaining from the opposition, particularly about two things: the mandatory vaccinations, or mandates, and the border. That is the recurrent theme. They are two of the public health measures that have been put in place that are keeping Western Australians safe. They are two of our most effective public health measures and have been overwhelmingly supported by the community and the business sector. We have a more than 99 per cent first-dose vaccination rate. That is overwhelming support for our vaccination mandates. I hear the opposition complaining about the two most effective public health measures that this government has put in place to manage what is a deadly disease.

The opposition continues to spread misinformation and fear. That is the hallmark of all the speeches that I have heard so far. It is misinformation and fear, and I call on the opposition to stop it, because we are entering a time that will be exceptionally challenging for Western Australia. I put it to the opposition that now is the time to show leadership and not whip up fear and misinformation. I will run through some examples that were provided by the member for Vasse, the opposition's spokesperson, when speaking to the amendment moved yesterday. I will run through some of those claims and address some of the claims of the Leader of the Opposition as well. The member for Vasse made a number of claims. The first claim was that Western Australia is no longer in step with the commonwealth government or the rest of the country. The Prime Minister has agreed with the McGowan government's decision to defer the full opening of the border. The Prime Minister said —

Omicron is a completely different virus. What we were doing before does not work the same under the Omicron virus.

The Prime Minister publicly supported that position to not open the border or lift the quarantine requirements when the eastern states cases were peaking. He publicly supported that decision.

The Liberal and National Party members supported their eastern states colleagues when they spent \$1 million to join Clive Palmer's border challenge, and now their own PM will not even back them.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, member for Cottesloe! You have had your opportunity.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Why would we want to be in step when 2 600 people have died in the eastern states in the last two months? I ask the opposition to explain why we need to be in step with states that are seeing thousands of deaths. We are learning from the east coast. We are understanding more and more every day about managing these settings.

I am disappointed that the member for Vasse is not in the chamber. I will have to say this again when she is. The member's next claim was that the real reason Western Australia is closed is that the health system will not cope. Wrong. The member went on to say that the government would not open up but the health system did not cope with Omicron. This year, we will spend \$10.8 billion on the health system. That is 22 per cent more than when the opposition was in government. Western Australia has the highest spending per capita on public hospitals and spends 13 per cent above the national average per capita. Western Australia is number one for emergency department stays of fewer than four hours around the country, and we are injecting \$3.2 billion to boost the Western Australian health system. We have increased the number of beds and increased recruitment to support that.

The member for Vasse's next claim was that the supply of RATs was a debacle and claimed that the Minister for Health was unable to say when the RATs were first ordered and that the government took action only after seeing the long queues in clinics over east. What a nonsense. I visited a warehouse on Sunday that was wall-to-wall RATs with millions and millions of RATs. The state government has ordered 110 million RATs. We have 10 million to hand. Across the health system and the Department of Finance, which will provide rapid antigen tests for other essential and critical workers, we have made no secret of the fact that subsequent orders were made in mid-December. I want to put that into perspective; there are 110 million RATs from the Western Australian government, and the Western Australian share of commonwealth RATs is 1.3 million. That is a fraction of the number of RATs that we are supplying to Western Australia. The aged-care sector still has not received its RATs from the commonwealth, so it will have access to the state supply. It is just more misinformation from the opposition.

The next claim from the member for Vasse was that the health system is understaffed and the recruitment of health staff is a debacle. We have increased the number of FTE nurses and midwives by 1 018 between January 2021 and January 2022. We exceeded our election commitment for 1 100 qualified nurses and midwives, we increased doctors by 129 FTE within that period, and 400-plus graduate doctors commenced employment in the WA health system by February 2022. Health FTE grew by 18.7 per cent between the March quarter when we came to government and the September quarter 2021. We have increased those frontline workers by 18 per cent. Under the previous Liberal–National government, FTE declined by nearly 1 000 in that final term.

The next claim was that somehow we dismissed George Milne as a mere mathematician. That is a nonsense claim. I stated a fact; that is his profession. The reality is that this is an exercise in public health hazard management. We

have to listen to public health experts and epidemiologists. The opposition continues to spread a litany of lies and confusion, including those spurious and fearmongering claims around Three Springs from the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Moore and Hon Martin Aldridge.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore, order!

Ms A. SANDERSON: That board has asked the opposition to stop.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Ms A. SANDERSON: I sat and listened to your contributions. I would appreciate a similar courtesy.

There are no plans to close small hospitals. There are no plans.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore!

Ms A. SANDERSON: The opposition needs to stop running around the state whipping up fear in small communities because that is the only kind of relevance that it can find for itself right now. I would say that the opposition needs to look elsewhere and find some actual relevance.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore! Leader of the Opposition!

Ms A. SANDERSON: That is all I heard out of the Leader of the Opposition's —

The ACTING SPEAKER: I have listened to the debate and I think the Minister for Health needs to have her opportunity. The members of the opposition have had their opportunity, so unless the minister is requesting interjections, I request that you do not interject. Thank you.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Thank you, Acting Speaker.

I listened to the litany of manipulation of facts and misinformation that came out of the Leader of the Opposition and the shameless hypocrisy that is shown, quite frankly, by this opposition, particularly when it comes to the border reopening or the lifting of the hard border. I want to correct some of that misinformation. More than 30 000 people have come into Western Australia since 5 February. That is not a hard border. More than 30 000 people have come across the border by air and by car. Many of those people are not Western Australians; they are people visiting family in Western Australia who have not been able to visit them. The border has been open at various times over the last two years to the rest of the country. To say that people have had two years of not being able to see each other is wrong. It is misinformation and it is peddling misinformation. That is exactly what it is.

When the Premier set the date based on Delta and based on the Chief Health Officer's advice, I want to remind members of the opposition what they said. They repeatedly stated that they would understand if the date for reopening had to change. They said they would not criticise the government if it had to change. But here we have another demonstration of the opposition scratching around for politics in every situation it comes across. In November last year, the Leader of the Opposition in this place said —

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.

Correct. It is a very fluid situation and we have to shift position when required. The member for Vasse said —

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.

When the member for Vasse said that she would not criticise us, the Deputy Premier went on to call that claim laughable, because here we are and true to form that is exactly what the opposition is doing. In the Legislative Assembly on 19 October, the Leader of the Opposition said —

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

The opposition clearly does not understand that that date needed to be moved. We have repeatedly said and the Premier has said that we will set a date this month.

Ms M.J. Davies interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Ms A. SANDERSON: We will set a date, absolutely.

Ms M.J. Davies: When?

Ms A. SANDERSON: We will set a date this month and you will know when it happens.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore! Leader of the Opposition, please.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Ms A. SANDERSON: You will absolutely know when it happens.

Let us just go back to the weeks leading up to 5 February and what was happening around the country. There were early claims that the Omicron variant was less severe, that hospitalisations were lower and that it was mostly affecting younger people; all sorts of claims were coming through, even though it had really only appeared in Australia at the end of November last year and early December. The first case was at the end of November last year. Leading up to that 5 February date, we started to see more and more people getting sick. Quite frankly, it has done what viruses do: they become more virulent and they aim to extinguish their competition. Omicron successfully extinguished Delta very quickly in the eastern states, became the dominant strain and spread. It spreads like wildfire. Because of the sheer volume of cases, there were therefore more hospitalisations. It is making more people sicker; therefore, the percentage of hospitalisations is higher. We were seeing a new impact that had not been seen with Delta, and that was furloughing of critical staff, not just in the health sector, but across essential public sectors. We heard fear from the eastern states saying that they were concerned that the community was breaking down because at any one time 25 per cent of the police force were furloughed because they were close contacts or sick. On single days in Victoria, 6 000 health workers could not go to work; that is 6 000 in one day, and the opposition conveniently tries to completely ignore those facts. That is an actual fact. That is what is happening in the rest of the country. There was increasing concern and anxiety amongst the community—I am sure the opposition would have got it—and people were starting to get very scared about the potential of thousands of cases seeding in Western Australia on day one. That is what that border setting, put in place based on Delta modelling and Delta framework, would have done. That is what would have happened: thousands of cases seeding on day one. That is what the opposition was calling for by sticking with 5 February. The community sees through the opposition's obfuscation and misinformation.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore, order!

Ms A. SANDERSON: Let me just give members some perspective on where Western Australia sits compared with the rest of the country. The total number of cumulative infections up to yesterday was 2.5 million. A total of 2 607 people have died since December—2 607 people have died since December! That is a national crisis. That is a crisis and a catastrophe. More than 2 600 families have lost their loved ones since December. That constitutes a catastrophe. That was the parameter the Premier put around changing the date. Members opposite must be the only people in Western Australia who think that that is not a catastrophe.

Dr D.J. Honey interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Cottesloe!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, member for Wanneroo! Order, members!

Ms A. SANDERSON: The Leader of the Opposition talked about the impact on business. I want to talk about the impact of the current border settings on small to medium-sized businesses. There have been calls to open the border from some of the bigger organisations, which have very sophisticated operations and probably pre-bought stocks of rapid antigen tests and have alternative workforce arrangements, outbreak plans and things in place to cope with COVID-19. I have no doubt that many of those operators are sophisticated and well prepared for COVID. However, single operators, sole traders and small to medium-sized businesses do not have access to those sorts of luxuries and supplies—they just do not—and they would have been the most impacted if we had allowed thousands of cases to seed in the first day and the first week of opening. A recent report on confidential Treasury modelling from New South Wales indicated that Omicron cost the New South Wales economy \$3.5 billion. The article states —

Confidential treasury modelling has warned the Omicron surge will cost the NSW economy at least \$3.5 billion and the state government cannot offer businesses the same financial support ...

I am running out of time, unfortunately, because I have so much to say about the nonsense, frankly, that comes across the opposition benches, but I will leave members with a thought. It is easy for opposition members to harp from the sidelines when they are not making decisions about people's lives and the lives of their children. I want members opposite to bear in mind a thought. In Queensland, there was a five-year-old girl whose name was Ruby.

Members will remember that the Queensland government came under enormous pressure from the commentariat, business and the federal government to open the borders; they all leant on Queensland to open the borders.

Let us talk about Ruby. The article reads —

Ruby was diagnosed with the rare, incurable condition, Cockayne syndrome type 2, in 2018, which meant she was unable to walk or talk.

But her mother says she found joy in life's simplest pleasures.

...

Three days before Ruby's death her health deteriorated rapidly and within hours she was on a ventilator. Then, her heart stopped.

"They resuscitated her and I think, she came back so she could give me that time to say goodbye," ...

"But I knew this time was different because her heart had never faltered before and this time, I just knew she was ready."

Ruby's family has taken aim at the Queensland government for reopening the border prior to the rollout of vaccines to children Ruby's age which did not begin until January 10—a decision the families said, "contributed to her passing".

"Perhaps more support and forethought should have been given to the families of the young and vulnerable," ...

...

The earliest vaccination appointment Ms McCosker could get her daughter was last Friday.

"She caught the virus before I could get her that little bit more immunity," ...

I can promise the opposition that when making decisions about the border and health settings, I will have at the front of my mind that children like Ruby, older people, vulnerable people and sick people who need support and protection should have the best possible chance to get protected against this virus.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order!

Ms A. SANDERSON: We will give them the best chance!

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order, member for Cottesloe!

Ms A. SANDERSON: We will give them the best chance, and the best chance they have is to get vaccinated. You can go on about modelling and fixate on it, but I will give them the best chance they have to get vaccinated and protect themselves, and you should too!

Division

Amendment put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms A.E. Kent) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (5)

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

Mr R.S. Love
Ms L. Mettam

Mr P.J. Rundle (*Teller*)

Noes (37)

Mr G. Baker
Ms L.L. Baker
Ms H.M. Beazley
Dr A.D. Buti
Mr J.N. Carey
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke
Ms C.M. Collins
Mr R.H. Cook
Ms L. Dalton
Mr M.J. Folkard

Ms M.J. Hammat
Mr T.J. Healy
Mr M. Hughes
Mr W.J. Johnston
Mr H.T. Jones
Ms A.E. Kent
Mr P. Lilburne
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.F. McGurk
Mr D.R. Michael

Mr K.J.J. Michel
Mr S.A. Millman
Ms L.A. Munday
Mrs L.M. O'Malley
Mr D.T. Punch
Ms R. Saffioti
Ms A. Sanderson
Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Ms J.J. Shaw
Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski

Dr K. Stratton
Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr D.A. Templeman
Ms C.M. Tonkin
Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms S.E. Winton
Ms C.M. Rowe (*Teller*)

Amendment thus negatived.

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 16 February 2022]

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Ms Mia Davies; Dr David Honey; Mr Vincent Catania; Amber-Jade Sanderson

Consideration Resumed

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

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