

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS

607. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Premier:

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

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question; I have a few things to say before I answer it. On behalf of the member for West Swan, I acknowledge the year 6 leaders, board and P&C members from Brabham Primary School; it is great to see you here. On behalf of the member for Cannington, I acknowledge the Clontarf Academy from Sevenoaks Senior College. On behalf of the member for Belmont, I acknowledge the Belmont Clontarf Academy. I acknowledge Mr David Gainer, the US Consul General, who has come to join us in the Parliament of Western Australia. Thank you so much, Consul General; it was a long trip for you to get here.

On a more sombre note, I acknowledge the family of, and the people searching for, Cleo Smith in the Gascoyne region. It is obviously a very, very distressing situation and we very much hope for a successful and happy outcome to this very, very awful and traumatic event.

In relation to the opposition leader's question, as I have said repeatedly, we expect that some time in the first half of next year, we will be able to open our border to New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. As of Friday this week, we will have an open border to South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and Queensland. People will be free to travel between all those jurisdictions and here, subject to the G2G PASS controls and other health measures. They will be free to travel between all those jurisdictions and here, which is the vast majority of the landmass of Australia. Millions of people will be able to move freely between here and those places. The issue with New South Wales and Victoria is clear for everyone; that is, if we open the border to New South Wales and Victoria too quickly, the virus will come here and we will have a very serious situation to deal with, as they have had to deal with. Our position consistently for the last two years has been that we will be cautious and careful and do what is safe and responsible to keep this state secure and healthy, and that is our plan.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the road maps of New South Wales and Victoria. I saw that the Victorian government had released its road map, which allows people to go out while wearing a mask. People from Melbourne are not allowed to go to country Victoria. People have to work from home, but at least they are allowed to work, and gatherings of 10 people are permitted. That is what is happening in Victoria, and it is something similar in New South Wales. When they say it is freedom, it is a very restricted freedom in New South Wales. Here in Western Australia, we do not have any of those restrictions. It is so hard for them over there to grasp that; they do not get it. We do not have any of those restrictions in place here in Western Australia because we do not have the virus and we are keen to keep it out whilst we get our population vaccinated.

Were we to follow, for instance, the Queensland road map, which the opposition leader mentioned, chances are we would get transmission of the virus in Western Australia before Christmas. Were that to occur, we would then have to look at public health safety measures. That may well be mask wearing, restrictions on restaurants and bars, restrictions on the capacity at various events, and restrictions on Christmas functions and holidays around Western Australia. I do not want to do that. Christmas is a wonderful time and I do not want to put restrictions in place over Christmas. We are trying to keep our tourism and hospitality industries and our economy as open and free as possible and prevent health outcomes that could be catastrophic within the state, whilst, at the same time, maximise the vaccination rollout in Western Australia and have a wonderful, lovely, exciting and normal Christmas in our state. That is our plan, and I certainly hope we can achieve it. Obviously, in light of the opposition's comments, it does not share that plan. Its plan, as it always has been, is to undermine everything this government tries to do to keep the people of Western Australia safe.