

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS

Matter of Public Interest

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

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

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [3.12 pm]: I move —

That this house calls on the Premier to outline the state government's road map to safely reopen state borders.

We do not do this lightly.

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister!

Ms M.J. DAVIES: We do it because we see the progress being made in other states, albeit with different levels of COVID and different levels of freedom, to outline a clear and concise plan so that everyone is on the same page and the community has a shared plan to work towards. The alternative is what we are dealing with at the moment, which is the Premier making decisions on a day-to-day basis, it would appear, on what information can be shared and when.

In a press conference earlier today, the Premier talked about the fact that we are going to include 12 to 16-year-olds in our total vaccination cohort. We heard today in question time that the Premier is considering mandating further cohorts of the state's community. We also heard the Premier refuse to outline whether any other targets have been given to the Vaccine Commander, and what will happen if those targets are not met, except to say that the relaxation of our borders will be pushed out to some unknown future date that he is unwilling to share. He talked about the ability for people to get vaccinated at the Brunswick Show this weekend, weeks after the opposition suggested that regional shows might be a good opportunity to vaccinate parts of our community. The government has missed some of the biggest field days and shows that we have had as part of our show season and the opportunity to get those vaccination rates up. Actually, when we put that suggestion to the Premier, it was met with great derision.

We seem to lurch from day to day with the Premier rolling out to the media to announce the next step of a plan that only he is aware of. It poses the question of whether the government is working to a plan and, if so, why it will not share that plan with the broader community. We are not saying that we should reopen tomorrow; we are not saying that we should reopen before it is safe. We are simply saying that the government needs to put together a plan with a series of thresholds that need to be met. It needs to put a date. People in Western Australia will understand if that date needs to be moved. They are watching the national and global media; they are watching what is happening. They understand that there are thresholds that need to be met, but there is no way that we are going to get to the vaccination targets that the Premier has set unless people start to rally behind incentives to move more freely across our borders and to understand what those requirements and restrictions will be if we do have a relaxation of the borders.

The Premier has made a decision that we will not be wearing masks at Christmas. I think that if the Premier put a plan to the people of Western Australia and allowed them to understand what he is working towards, he might find that some people would be more than happy to take on some of those restrictions if it meant that they would be able to spend time with their families at Christmas, but we are denied the ability to have that debate because the plan either is inside the Premier's head or does not exist. I do not think that either of those situations are appropriate for a state that has enjoyed COVID-free status for the last 18-plus months, has had plenty of time to prepare, and has certainly had plenty of time to articulate what it is working towards.

We see that New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and even Tasmania have released road maps for safely reopening their state borders. I acknowledge that the Premier said during question time that there are different levels of freedoms within those plans, so our road map would be fit for the current Western Australian circumstances. We are not asking for the government to replicate the plans that have been issued in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria or Tasmania, but simply to lay out the plan for Western Australia. The Premier refuses to table or release health modelling that has been provided to the government, so we are in the dark. We are not sure what impact he is trying to mitigate, work out or ameliorate in relation to our health preparedness and our hospital systems. The community is in the dark.

The time has come for the Premier to share with the rest of Western Australia the plan that he is holding so close to his chest. It is time to lay out that plan so that we can get behind it. For businesses, separated families, tourists and communities—for everyone—it is time for the Premier to deliver on that promise of gold-standard transparency. The government should share the health modelling and outline the targets and dates for progress towards reopening, clearly articulate what, if any, restrictions will be in place as this progresses and explain the health advice for those

who will be double vaccinated and those who have chosen not to be vaccinated at all. If the government cannot do this, we have to ask what it has been doing.

The Premier cannot keep the borders shut forever. I do not think anyone thinks that is feasible, and I certainly hope that the Premier does not, even if the government is supportive of it right now. The time for these vague statements and this piecemeal approach to releasing information to the public has passed. If the borders are to remain closed indefinitely, the Premier has to explain why. He has to come clean on the health modelling and the impact that reopening the borders will have on our hospitals. The Minister for Health says that we are ready and we have surge plans. If that is the case, the government needs to lay out the plan so that we can understand what we are working towards. It needs to create some urgency for those people who are complacent or hesitant to get their vaccinations done. I and others understand that not having a target is actually feeding into that 15 per cent of the population who have not yet been or do not want to be vaccinated. We are not asking for a plan that is reckless with people's lives. I want to be very clear about that: we are not asking for a plan that is reckless with people's lives. I am sure that is how the Premier will paint this motion. We are simply asking for a plan and a target, because, at present, we have no certainty.

I think the Premier needs to trust the people of Western Australia. We have been living with this situation and watching what has happened in other states; we understand that there will always be riders on these plans—these dates. I think the Premier does not want to set a date because he does not want to shift it, but if we cannot see what those targets are and we do not understand what those thresholds are, the Premier can never be held to account for anything. It is absolutely imperative that we see what the government is working on. We understand the unpredictability of the disease we are facing, but the Premier need not fear that the public will not understand that the settings in any plan may be only indicative. Certainly, other states' plans have that written into them. They state: "These are indicative dates. These are the things that we need to reach for things to happen and what will happen if we do not reach those dates." They state what will happen for business, communities and people arriving across their borders when they reach those dates. I do not think that is an unreasonable proposition. The Premier has two choices on how to respond today. He can choose to deflect and falsely accuse the opposition of wishing harm on our community, which could not be further from the truth—all we are saying is that we wish to see some sort of road map that people can get behind and rally towards so that we can see a light at the end of the tunnel—or he can outline the work being done to make sure that our state has a plan to reopen safely. He can deflect or outline a plan. Clearly, the Premier had the opportunity in front of the media today to outline that plan, but he did not do so. When we sit down, we expect that the next 20 minutes will be filled with deflection and accusations that the opposition is being reckless. We are not; we are simply asking for a plan.

Instead of waking up to news that the government has hand-picked a new cohort of people to mandate vaccinations for, we all want to understand what those details are, what health advice has been provided and how they are being prioritised—list them. Those are the questions that every member of Parliament is being asked: are we next in line? Instead, we have the Premier focusing on a cohort in Parliament, members of Parliament, of whom over 95 per cent are vaccinated. We are leading by example on the behaviours that we want to see in our community. We do not need distractions and politics; we just need the Premier to be up-front. Is there a plan or not? What has the Premier been doing to make sure that we have a road map out of COVID? What target has been set for vaccination rates and how will that be calculated across ages and geographical regions so that our vulnerable communities are kept safe? What date are we working towards for relaxing the border controls and what quarantine arrangements will be in place for when those changes occur? What restrictions, if any, will there be for vaccinated and unvaccinated people? What will be required for venues and events to maintain public safety? What will trigger a lockdown in the state? I do not think there is any reason for the Premier not to provide that information or a date for when that information will be clarified. When will that plan be released?

At the same time, it would be appropriate for the Minister for Health to expand on his answers to questions he was asked in question time to make sure that the words he says in this chamber reflect the reality in our health system. If there is nothing to worry about in our health system, it is one less thing we need to worry about when laying out a plan and a road map for reopening safely. I do not think it is unreasonable, Premier, for the community to expect a plan. People have worked hard and have been largely compliant with the restrictions placed on them. It is true that we have enjoyed freedoms that other states have not enjoyed, but we have also lived in a state of emergency for 18 months, and the government cannot or will not tell us when this might end. It is not unreasonable; it is time the government laid out those plans for the community to see, if for no other reason than that we accelerate the vaccination plan that the Premier talked about today and get as many people as possible vaccinated as fast as possible.

MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.23 pm]: I rise to support this motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. The motion seeks an outcome for the health of Western Australians and some clarity from the Premier of Western Australia. This house condemns the Premier and the Labor government for failing to prepare to open up, lagging vaccination rates, having a dangerously unprepared health system and having no coherent plan.

As the Leader of the Opposition stated, we are not calling on the government to open the borders and remove restrictions before it is necessary. We on this side, or in this corner, of the house are seeking some clarity for the benefit of Western Australians who have overwhelmingly done the right thing in doing the heavy lifting to keep fellow Western Australians safe. This motion is also in support of the many health workers who increasingly feel undervalued by the McGowan Labor government. In fact, the last Your Voice in Health survey illustrated that only 47 per cent of health workers felt valued and only one in three felt comfortable speaking up to say that they did not feel safe in their work environment.

Today was another day with another press conference from a Premier who has no clear plan for the people and businesses of WA. There is no clear road map for reopening the state's borders, and today the Premier confirmed that there is absolutely no plan to reopen until next year. He does not want to spend Christmas with a mask on so we will stay locked up. There was an expectation that the Premier would follow the Premiers of other states in clearly mapping out what it would mean and what it would look like. The Leader of the Opposition has suggested that clarity on that would be of benefit and hopefully address the lagging vaccination rates that we have seen in WA. We have seen complacency replace supply as the number one issue in terms of vaccination rates. For the benefit of our community, our vaccination rates need to be at an acceptable level so that we can prepare for when, and if, COVID comes into the WA community.

After the announcement in Queensland yesterday, 13 000 vaccines were administered at state-run clinics. That is perhaps because Queensland has a plan and the Premier of that state gave some certainty and transparency around what the modelling had suggested for that state. Queenslanders were told to get vaccinated and that the state would reopen on a specific date. There was clarity around that and people obviously responded. Not so in WA, which has the worst vaccination rates in the country. The Premier stated that we will open when the time is right and it is safe to do so.

Ms A. Sanderson: You're misleading the Parliament.

Ms L. METTAM: The minister will have her time to speak.

Ms A. Sanderson: You're misleading the Parliament—tell the truth.

Ms L. METTAM: I absolutely am not.

There was more of the same from the Premier, with little incentive to address these issues of complacency. In April last year, the Minister for Health, Roger Cook, told the ABC that the government just needed to buy time to allow the health system to prepare and become battle ready. The elimination-style approach was not on the table and he claimed that when the storm hit, we would be ready. Eighteen months on, there are genuine concerns about whether we are ready—whether our health system is ready. We have real concerns and would like to hear some clarity around the plan and the concerns coming from the health system.

The latest report from the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society contains another damning figure about the WA health system; that is, we have the lowest number of intensive care unit beds per capita in Australia, with six per 100 000. That is well below the national average of 8.5 beds per 100 000. The report also reveals that the number of ICU beds in WA has dropped from 179 beds in March 2020 to 159. As we prepare to battle the coming storm, according to the Minister for Health, how is it that the number of ICU beds has gone backwards? Also, why is that, given reports from every other country affected by COVID outbreaks about their reliance on surge capacity? The report goes into detail about how relying on surge capacity leads to lesser patient outcomes, but we are increasingly relying on surge capacity as well. What is still not clear is where and how they will be utilised. We hear that there is a reliance on ventilators, and the report fairly points out that ventilators and equipment are no longer an issue, but there are outstanding questions about where the additional beds are going to come from, given the pressure our health system is already under.

The Minister for Health asked me to step out into public with him today and ask a question about our health system. Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital is experiencing a code yellow due to capacity issues. I understand that over the past 12 months there have been 111 code yellow internal emergencies because of issues related to capacity. This raises the question, together with the fact that we are relying on surge capacity for ICU beds and that we have fewer ICU beds than we did 12 months ago: to what extent we are prepared for COVID in the community and is this the limiting factor? There is concern about the health system's preparedness. More than 1 000 elective surgeries were cancelled in August. We heard in estimates today that over 500 elective surgeries were cancelled in September as well. This is one of the levers that the government talks about utilising if and when there is the risk of a COVID outbreak, but quite clearly we are already seeing cancellations of these surgeries right now. That will be a significant concern further down the track.

The Australian Medical Association has warned that if governments do not resource the wider system and ensure contingency arrangements for non-COVID patients, we will see a secondary effect of avoidable mortality and morbidity from non-COVID conditions through significantly delayed care. This is the real issue. The real concern

is about our health system's preparedness. The ICU report, which, as I stated, illustrates that WA is lagging behind every other state despite an iron ore surplus and despite having over 18 months without COVID in the community, raises real questions about what this government has been doing to ensure our Western Australian community is as safe as possible. That is why we also need some clarity, because we need to address the complacency issues that have led to such poor vaccination rates.

The AMA has called for the government to urgently upskill our workers. It has urged the government to utilise the learnings from the other states, in particular Victoria, where I understand there was a four-day ICU nurse short course. The AMA has talked about the fact that the integrated practice units used in other states could be accessed and utilised here so that an ICU nurse could cover two to four patients with nurses who had completed such a course. We heard in the Legislative Council's Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations today that some health services have started upskilling, but there is little detail on how many, and tranche 2 is not expected to start until later this year. Perhaps that is one of the other reasons the Premier is looking at such a late start date for the easing of such restrictions.

As I stated, we are seeing a government that is heavily reliant on surge capacity. The experience of COVID-19 outbreaks in the United States and Europe show that outcomes for patients in intensive care are significantly poorer if ICUs need to adopt surge approaches, which will entail compromised staffing arrangements and providing care in unfamiliar environments. It is important to understand whether that is one of the other limiting factors. Instead of building an army of trained and upskilled health workers to cope with the inevitable arrival of the virus, this government has focused all its efforts on drawing up the drawbridge and hoping there are not any chinks in the chain. Eighteen to 20 months on, why does it appear that we are far from ready? Where are the extra staff? In April, the Minister for Health announced a national and international recruitment drive, but today in estimates we heard from health representatives that there are shortages across every jurisdiction within WA. Obviously, the situation in the East Kimberley is at imminent crisis point in its service value, which is a real concern considering the low vaccination rates there as well. We clearly need a plan; we need to understand how this government is prepared for COVID. That is simply what we are asking on behalf of patients, the people of WA and our important undervalued healthcare workers as well.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.35 pm]: One of the problems for this government is that it is more concerned about stunts and gimmicks than it is about engaging the public of Western Australia in a mature conversation about how to transition from the current situation to a situation in which we have more normal movement of people across the country and inside Western Australia. The nature of this sort of shallow approach by the government was no more exemplified than during question time, with the Premier's considerable discourtesy to a member in the other place by consistently using his incorrect honorific, and also misleading this place in his statement. The Premier made a statement that Hon Nick Goiran discouraged people from getting vaccinated. I will read an article by Charlotte Elton from *The West Australian* of Tuesday, 12 October this year. It states that Mr Goiran —

... said that as shadow attorney-general, he had a duty to advocate for people's right to medical history privacy—but he supported vaccination.

“I can say that I support vaccinations and encourage every West Aussie to discuss the matter confidentially with their doctor before they provide their informed consent,” Mr Goiran said.

To say that Hon Nick Goiran is discouraging people from getting vaccinated is in fact untrue. That is some stunt that the Premier is doing. He thought he could wedge or harm the reputation of someone on our side, rather than focus on the real issue.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The real issue that we face in Western Australia is that we will have to transition from the position we are in now, with extremely tight border controls but not a total exclusion of people. We know that we can bring people safely into Western Australia, and it is one of the challenges we put to the government from the start of this crisis: how do we continue to bring those critical workers into the state? We will have to transition, though, and when we do, that will have a real impact on our society and community. We know that COVID will last for possibly decades. We know that when COVID comes into our community, there will be negative health impacts. Everyone in this place, and no more and no less than the government, we on this side want as safe and healthy a community as we possibly can, but we know that when we transition from where we are now to a freer movement of people, that will have a real impact. That is why the government needs to have a conversation with the community. Real decisions are being made that will have a negative impact on some people's lives, in the same way that the government had to have a serious look at mandating vaccinations, because in a very small percentage of cases with the vaccine, it causes negative outcomes for people. If we are going to mandate it, we need to make sure that there is a very good reason for it and we discuss it and get the right medical advice. We have heard that the Premier wants a 90 per cent

vaccination rate before opening up Western Australia. It is patently clear that that is unlikely, and even the commander, Mr Dawson, who has been put in charge of vaccination, has said that.

On the news last night, the Vaccine Commander said that five per cent of people will not get vaccinated, which is something we have seen around the world; but another 15 per cent will not get vaccinated until they have some real fear that COVID will arrive in Western Australia. We have said many times that the government has done a good job. We have congratulated it on keeping the community safe. The trouble is that whilst those people's perception is that there is no likelihood they will be exposed to COVID, they will not get vaccinated, and we will never achieve a vaccination rate of 90 per cent. It will be extremely unlikely that we will achieve a 90 per cent vaccination rate, even next year, unless that hesitant 15 per cent of the community, who are not philosophically opposed to vaccines but for whatever reason feel it is not worthwhile, realise and recognise that there will come a time when they need that defence of the vaccine. That is why the government should have a conversation with the community. That is why it should get out there and do everything in its power to get those people vaccinated. As has been said many times in this place, unfortunately, Western Australia has one of the lowest vaccination rates in the country.

On the latest numbers I have, Western Australia's vaccination rate for the first dose is 73 per cent and for both jabs is 56 per cent. However, when we look at the vaccination rates regionally, we face the real prospect of our state being a divided state with communities being excluded from opening. The vaccination rate for double doses in Karratha is 21.2 per cent; in Ashburton, 21.2 per cent; in Port Hedland, 22.4 per cent; and in the east Pilbara, 24 per cent. Even in the Premier's own electorate of Rockingham, the double-dose vaccination rate is 50.5 per cent. The next time the Premier is down at the Swinging Pig and accepting the adulation of electors in that area, perhaps he can put some of his own sweat and blood in there and encourage those people to get vaccinated. The Premier can argue this any way he likes, but he is in government and is responsible for the outcomes we are seeing. The Premier cannot point to other people—to a member in the other place or to the federal government. This is the Premier's responsibility.

It is patently clear that this government has not done enough on vaccinations. It is also patently clear and well pointed out by the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse, that the Minister for Health and the Premier have not done enough to prepare our hospital system for this crisis. Our hospital system cannot even cope with existing demand for normal medical conditions and procedures, let alone emergencies. This government has failed to prepare the state properly for this transition and is not engaging the people in that discussion.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [3.42 pm]: Obviously, the government will not support this motion in the way it is currently worded. Once again, it shows that members of the Liberal and National Parties are trying to undermine everything the government does. That is all the opposition does. It has not changed over the course of the last two years. It is a broken record and has undermined everything the government has done to keep the people of Western Australia safe and our economy as strong as it possibly can be. For some reason, members opposite have not learnt the lessons from this. The people in this state want to be safe, and they want strong job opportunities, but for some reason over the course of the last two years the Liberal and National Parties have continued the constant whining, whingeing and carping that got them the result it got them in the March election.

I want to deal with some of the arguments. Some great furrphies have been promulgated in the eastern states by ill-informed people and in Western Australia by the Liberals and Nationals. The motion even refers to the first furrphy: we have to open up! Why is Western Australia not open? They are asking why Western Australia is not open. Why is it that Western Australia is not open? I again have to tell members opposite that we are open. They keep saying that the state is not open! We are open. Western Australia is open. I hear them over east: "Why isn't Western Australia open?" We are open. Members can walk down the mall and there are lots of people there. All the shops are open. All the businesses are open. All the government departments are open. All the schools, universities and TAFE colleges are open. I just want people to understand that. I saw them out there on Saturday protesting, "Why don't we open up? Why aren't we open in WA?" We are open! They marched down the mall demanding that we open our retail shops—they are open! What is wrong with them? Why do the Liberals and Nationals not understand that we are actually open? That is the first point.

The second point is about our borders. They ask: why are the borders closed? I pose the question: why has the commonwealth closed our international borders? It is to keep Australia safe. Why does Western Australia close some interstate borders? It is to keep Western Australia safe. It is exactly the same argument. Why is it that we have had to constantly explain this to people for two years? As of Friday, we will not have closed borders to most of Australia, certainly in a geographic sense. Western Australia's border will be open to Queensland, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania, as of Friday. We will all be able to travel between each of those places as we wish. We will be able to go to Tasmania or Queensland on holidays. If we really want to go to South Australia, we can go there as well! We can go to the Northern Territory on holidays, if we wish. Currently, we can go to all those places bar Queensland. That is the current rule.

I hear it all the time from some media commentators over there and some federal politicians: why has Western Australia closed its borders? They do not know the facts. They do not understand basic facts: the state is

open to communities that are COVID-free. We have the same rules as Tasmania, yet for some reason Tasmania is ignored by the commonwealth government and ignored by the media. If I was the Tasmanian Premier, I would be a bit offended by the fact that they treat Tasmania in that way. All the attention goes to Western Australia. We are open to all those jurisdictions, but clearly we are not open to New South Wales and Victoria. Because New South Wales made a mess of handling the virus in June, it spread to Victoria and now both places are dealing with huge COVID outbreaks. It makes perfect sense to me that until such time as we have high levels of vaccination, we will not be open to those jurisdictions. But we have exactly the same rule as the commonwealth put in place internationally. Everyone in the national press and everyone in the Liberal Party and National Party seem to think that is entirely reasonable, but when a state does the same, they say that it is not reasonable. I thought the Liberals and Nationals believed in state rights. Clearly, these days they do not. I hear it from Mr Frydenberg, the Prime Minister and Mr Joyce. My God, Mr Joyce is the biggest centralist there ever was! He does not care that states might do things. He does not think that states should be able to do things differently from the commonwealth. Mr Joyce thinks that is somehow a North Korean attribute—the dynamic Leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister of Australia no less.

Let us look at the states that everyone in the Liberal and National Parties are lauding: “Isn’t it great what is happening in Victoria and New South Wales!” I heard Mr Frydenberg say that what is happening in New South Wales and Victoria is great and he then asked why Western Australia is not doing the same. I have heard him ask why Western Australia is so locked down, when New South Wales and Victoria are doing such a great job. I just googled the rules in New South Wales and Victoria. In Victoria, people cannot travel from Melbourne to the regions. They cannot actually leave Melbourne and travel to the regions. People can have only 10 visitors to their homes. In Melbourne, 15 people can gather outside. They have to wear a mask in Melbourne. They are allowed to have 20 people indoors at restaurants, and five vaccinated people are allowed in a hairdressing salon. Retail shops are not permitted to open, and there is a staggered return to school, starting later this month. That is freedom, according to the people of Victoria, because it is so different from what they have been experiencing. That is freedom in the Victorian situation.

In New South Wales, 50 people are allowed to gather outside and 20 people are allowed to go to someone’s home. They are now allowed to stand whilst having a drink. In New South Wales, people are required to wear a mask on public transport or whilst in retail, and it has reinstated the four-square-metre rule on hospitality and other venues amongst a bunch of other restrictions. The Sydney press gallery is lauding the incredible achievement that is currently happening in New South Wales. Meanwhile, they have 400 or 500 cases today and a whole range of people dying.

In Western Australia, we do not have any restrictions. Here we all are in Parliament, having a wonderful time! We are able to rally. I was at Crown Perth the other day for a whole range of Telethon events with a bunch of my Labor colleagues and some federal Liberals. There were so many people there enjoying it. Thousands of people were there enjoying it and all were in close proximity to each other. That is the Western Australian model at this point in time. That is the Western Australian model that we are being condemned for. The cacophony of criticism that I hear coming from the Liberals and Nationals over east is “How terrible is it that Western Australia has this system in place.” I do not hear so much from the federal Liberals here because they actually get it. The state Liberals and Nationals in Western Australia do not get it, and some of the federal Liberals and Nationals over east do not get it, but the Liberals here, federally, do get it, so I have noted that the criticism has toned right down.

If we were to open up like Queensland, as I have heard some people say, the reality is that the chances are COVID would be introduced here. If that were to occur before Christmas, over the entire Christmas period there would be public health safety measures put in place. Because we do not have that high enough level of vaccination at this point as we would like to, obviously, were it to be introduced now before Christmas, it could very well mean significant measures would be put in place across Western Australia, particularly in the south west of the state. Measures could include mask wearing, restrictions on numbers in venues and certain venues not being able to operate. Remember all the rules about standing up whilst drinking and not being able to dance and all those sorts of things? Obviously, for the hospitality industry, which earns somewhere between 30 and 40 per cent of its entire income over the Christmas period, it would be disastrous. I do not get why the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia does not get that. I know that the CCIWA is not so focused on small business, but these are mum-and-dad small businesses. Why does the CCIWA not understand that? Why do the Liberals and Nationals not understand that? Why is it that some of the federal commentators over east do not understand that? If that were to occur over the Christmas period, it could be very, very awful for all those mum-and-dad businesses around Western Australia. All the tourism businesses are doing very well around the state at this point. They have never been stronger. Tourism has never been stronger around Western Australia than it is now. Members know that if they try to book somewhere, it is very difficult because it is very busy, which creates its own problems as well for people who like to go on holiday, but, unfortunately, that is the reality of the world that we are dealing with now. These little businesses and some of their representative organisations get it, but, for some reason, CCIWA and the Liberals and Nationals in Western Australia, at a state level, do not get it.

Obviously, Queensland is in a different position. The reason Queensland is in a different position economically is that the Queensland tourism industry relies so incredibly heavily on tourists from New South Wales and Victoria. That is why there is such demand for it because its economy is totally different from ours. Queensland, roughly, has the same vaccination rates as us. We are a bit ahead on first dose, but Queensland's rates are roughly the same. Queensland knows that much of its economy is very dependent on those people from, as they describe it, down south. Therefore, the business dynamic in Queensland is different from what it is here. Imagine if we had to put in place mask wearing and restrictions on numbers in venues and numbers of people who can go for Christmas lunch. We have our Christmas events and some people have big families and everyone wants to gather. Imagine if we had to put in place the rules in Victoria of 10 people allowed for a Christmas function! But some people seem to be calling for that in Western Australia. Why do not we open up? Somehow, what we have done is wrong. Therefore, if we open up and allow people like me to go and see my mum and dad—imagine that; that would be lovely for me—what about all these people here who had to shut down businesses or were not allowed to have Christmas functions and events? What about all that? What about the people, then, who would get sick and potentially die? It would be a shocking thing to occur before such time as we get to very high levels of vaccination.

Then there is the great furphy about vaccination rates. Western Australia is at roughly the same level of vaccination as Queensland. We are slightly ahead on first dose and slightly behind on second dose. We are ahead of the Northern Territory. We are slightly behind South Australia. When it comes to the vaccination levels, in Western Australia, in the 80-plus category at first dose, 97 per cent of people are done. In the 70 to 79 category at first dose, nearly 100 per cent of people are done. In the 60 to 69 category, 90.7 per cent are done. In the 50 to 59 category, 84.2 per cent are done. It is a stellar record in those categories. We have to remember that they have had the opportunity to get vaccinated for much longer than the younger age groups because of the rules that have been in place over the course of the last eight months or so, so they have had much greater opportunity. For the 16-plus category, as of today, we are at 75.6 per cent for the first dose and 57.6 per cent for the second dose. It creeps up by 0.6 per cent or thereabouts each day. Therefore, there is a great furphy out there that somehow Western Australia has not kept up with New South Wales; therefore, it is a disaster. I hear this all the time: "Oh, New South Wales has higher vaccination levels than Western Australia." Three or four months ago, one million doses of Pfizer came in from Poland and New South Wales received 500 000 of them and we received 50 000! Then there were all sorts of other measures to pour more Pfizer vaccine into New South Wales because New South Wales was in such a diabolical position. I understand that, but because we gave vaccines to New South Wales we should not be criticised for it. Should there not actually be an understanding nationally that the other states did the right thing by New South Wales by agreeing to that? Should that not be something for which people say, "That's a good thing", rather than criticising us for not having the same vaccination rates than a state that received far more vaccines per capita?

Our vaccine rates continue to climb. Our rate is progressing well. We are comparable to South Australia, ahead of the Northern Territory and virtually identical to Queensland. All states are in roughly similar condition to ours in terms of community spread of the virus. The Australian Capital Territory is a city, in effect, and has nearly 100 per cent coverage, but it has had the virus and it is a city. Members can imagine the ACT would be a very compliant place when it comes to these things!

In terms of measures, the other issue about vaccination that we copped criticism about was that we do not have it as high as New South Wales and Victoria, which is true, for a whole range of reasons, including the fact that they have had mass outbreaks. If you have mass outbreaks, of course people are going to get vaccinated more quickly. But the idea that we want to have a mass outbreak to encourage vaccination is not something that I accept, even though, again, I see a National commentator actually suggesting this. There is a collective form of Stockholm syndrome going on in Sydney where they cannot see anything outside of that prism and that there is another Australia out there. In terms of measures with vaccines, we have opened the Mirrabooka clinics and one in Armadale, too. There are about 90 to 100 clinics around regional WA. We have mandated vaccinations for the mining industry. Think about that; that was a pretty big decision that we took. I went to the Rio Tinto vaccination centre at the airport the other day and people were lined up and this is happening across the mining sector. We are going to mandate more parts of the workforce very soon because, on health advice, that is what is appropriate. That will lift our vaccination rate as well. We are also providing more innovative opportunities for vaccination. That will go on as well, with Commissioner Dawson leading that. Those measures will make a difference as well.

I would urge those people who are critical of all these things to be a bit more positive. That includes the state opposition. It includes the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia. The CCI, instead of criticising us and wanting us to open up before we have high levels of vaccination and, therefore, infecting the state and having to close down industries, should be encouraging every single business across Western Australia to encourage their staff to get vaccinated. That is, first and foremost, what it should be doing. We have the strongest economy of anywhere in Australia or anywhere in the world. I do not want to undo that. I want that to continue. I would have thought the CCIWA would want that to continue as well. I guarantee that other industry groups do. They do, because they get that small business needs us to remain as COVID-free as we can whilst we get our vaccination levels up. They get it, particularly over the Christmas period. It is a pity the CCIWA does not. I think it should talk to a few

more small businesses to ask them what they think. I think the Liberals and Nationals should talk to a few more small businesses and ask them what they think.

We will get to a point at which we will open to New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT. We are trying to remain COVID-free whilst we get to that point. We do not want to have an outbreak. Outbreaks are very debilitating and they can cause a lot of grief. While we get to that high level of vaccination and prepare to open to those states, it is best that we stay COVID-free. That is our plan. Inhibiting that before such time as we have that high level of vaccination would not be good for the state—the health of the people of Western Australia or the businesses within this state.

We will announce a date at some point in the future, but we are not going to do it precipitously whereby we set a timetable that may not be correct. We want to be as accurate as we can so we give people confidence, we give businesses confidence, and we make sure that the people of Western Australia understand that we are doing it on the basis of the best health advice based upon the circumstances of very high levels of vaccination.

Amendment to Motion

Mr M. McGOWAN: I move —

That all words after “house” be deleted and the following be inserted —

notes the state government’s plan to reopen Western Australia’s borders to New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT when it is safe to do so.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [4.02 pm]: I rise to make some brief comments on this motion. Obviously, I oppose the substantive motion and support the amended motion. I will not be as brief as the Leader of the Liberal Party, who spent most of his time defending “The Clan” which essentially runs the Liberal Party! I wonder when the Leader of the Liberal Party is going to defend the women in the Liberal Party rather than continuing to support those people who publicly describe him as an embarrassment. Why does he not come out for a change and say that it is not good enough to call people “sandwich makers” and it is not good enough to call them a “prized bitch” or a “toxic cow”? Why does the Leader of the Liberal Party not condemn those actions rather than continuing to support those who oppose him in the upper house but run the Liberal Party, and actually support the women of the Liberal Party? The Leader of the Liberal Party clearly does not deserve their support.

Today, those opposite said that they are seeking a road map. The situation on the east coast is dynamic. New South Wales, despite 500 deaths and over 65 000 cases of COVID-19, is opening up its community to further interaction. We saw the example of what happened in Singapore. It had a vaccination rate of about 70 to 80 per cent and it opened up its community to all manner of slighter public health measures. As a result of that, there was a surge in the number of cases. Obviously, we want to make sure that we see what goes on over there before we ever commit to exposing ourselves to the level of disease that they have in those communities.

The Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Vasse, says she is seeking outcomes and clarity. She has seen the outcomes. In Western Australia, there are now three cases of COVID-19—two in State Health Incident Coordination Centre hotels and one in hospital. That is the outcome of keeping Western Australians safe. The member for Vasse wants clarity. We will give her clarity: we are not going to open to those other states until it is safe to do so! Look at the situation on the east coast. At the moment, 60 per cent of their COVID cases in hospital are unvaccinated—33 per cent of those with only one dose. Just seven per cent of those people with COVID-19 in hospitals have been vaccinated and they are predominantly people who are aged 70-plus with comorbidities.

The solution for Western Australia is clear—it is vaccination. As the Premier said, we are currently level-pegged with Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. We are making good progress, but we are not there yet. The road map for WA is quite simple—get yourself vaccinated. Make sure that you are ready for when Delta comes into the community, whether that is tomorrow, next month or next year. It is important that people in Western Australia get themselves vaccinated. Our hospital system will be ready. It will be ready because we are increasing our vaccination rates. Currently, WA Health has a well-defined outbreak surge plan, which has been reviewed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes 8 631 public and private general beds and a capacity of 316 intensive care unit beds, off our current baseline of about 111. We have an extra 271 ventilators, with additional available to be deployed in the event of any ICU surge—219 in metro areas and 52 in regional locations. Our ventilator capacity is 600, in addition to the 332 beds that we recently announced, and there is ongoing work with the commonwealth to appropriately move people who are finishing acute care to residential facilities to create a further 100-bed capacity. We have the means to fight COVID and live with it into the future. It is through vaccination, it is through hospital capacity and it is through careful management of our borders, which we have done throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure that we keep Western Australians safe.

In relation to the opposition, at least its members are consistent! They have consistently said, “Tear down the borders” and we have consistently opposed their moves to tear down the borders. We have made sure that we have resisted the urges of those who are drunk on the tonic that is weaved by the media on the east coast. We know what is good for Western Australians—it is keeping them safe.

Ms Mia Davies; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Ms Rita Saffioti

As the Leader of the Liberal Party said, we have dangerously low vaccination rates in regional Western Australia. We have a lot of work to do there. But that is the same in New South Wales. The cases seen in New South Wales at the moment are predominantly in regional New South Wales. We will continue to see the deaths mount and we will continue to see high case numbers. We do not want to be there. Opposition members should stop looking at mirages on the horizon weaved for them by the east coast media and their leaders in the Liberal and National Parties on the east coast. Back Western Australia for a change! Actually come on board. We know what we can do in WA to keep us safe. We know what we can do to make sure that we can rely less upon the borders, and that is around vaccination. Support our vaccination efforts by making sure that you encourage everyone in the community to get vaccinated. By God, I wish the CCI would come on board and support that campaign as well, rather than carping from its expensive benches down the Terrace. It is time for Western Australians to get on board to get themselves vaccinated. It is time for those opposite to get on board and support our efforts to keep Western Australians safe.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan — Minister for Transport) [4.08 pm]: What has been demonstrated again in today's Parliament is there are two worlds out there. One is the world inhabited by the general public of Western Australia, who are grateful for the fact that their kids can go to school, that they can catch up with family, that their businesses are growing and the economy is growing, and that everyone who wants a job pretty much can get a job in Western Australia currently. The general public is grateful to be able to live in what is very much a free society.

There is another world, and that world is a world inhabited by the opposition in this place, members of the media in the eastern states and some rogue, out-of-control federal members. The public of Western Australia is grateful for the opportunity to live normally. What is all this discussion of 70, 80 and 90 per cent about? Over there, it is about whether someone can get out of their house and get a coffee; it is about whether someone can stand up or sit down to have a beer. That is what it is about. What is it about over here? It is about borders with two states, because everything else is open. In WA we are fully open, and from Friday travel to many of the states, apart from New South Wales and Victoria, will be open. That is what this debate is about. It is ultimately about two borders to Victoria and New South Wales, and, of course, the international border, which is a responsibility of the federal government. This is what it is all about. Tune in to the Western Australian public and understand that people are grateful. Like I said, kids go to school, kids play community sport, people go and watch sport and people go to concerts. That is what the general public is thinking. That is why there are only six opposition members. They were out of touch in March and they have not sought to get in touch with the general public now. Their constant undermining of the management of COVID in this state is again demonstrated today.

The Leader of the Liberal Party spent one-third of his time defending the indefensible from Hon Nick Goiran. In the March election, the Liberal Party ran COVID conspiracy theorists across the state. In my seat and that of the member for Burns Beach there were candidates who believed the 5G conspiracy and that horse tablets were a cure for COVID. They continually work in the minority. Again, today has demonstrated that the opposition is operating in a different world. The Premier, the Minister for Health and the government have worked to protect the health and the economy of the state, and we will continue to do that. Again, this is an opposition that is too lazy to do any real work. It gets the latest tweet from one of the latest journos and runs a whole matter of public interest on it again. There are two worlds. Ask members of the general public what they think about what is happening in WA and they say they are proud of WA, they are getting vaccinated and they do not want things to change in a hurry.

Division

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms M.M. Quirk) casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (44)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr M. McGowan	Ms M.M. Quirk
Mr G. Baker	Ms J.L. Hanns	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms R. Saffioti
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Ms A. Sanderson
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr M. Hughes	Mr S.A. Millman	Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Ms C.M. Collins	Mr H.T. Jones	Ms L.A. Munday	Dr K. Stratton
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Ms D.G. D'Anna	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr P. Papalia	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr M.J. Folkard	Ms A.E. Kent	Mr S.J. Price	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Ms K.E. Giddens	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr D.T. Punch	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr P. Lilburne	Mr J.R. Quigley	Ms C.M. Rowe (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (5)

Mr V.A. Catania	Dr D.J. Honey	Mr P.J. Rundle (<i>Teller</i>)
Ms M.J. Davies	Ms L. Mettam	

Amendment thus passed.

Ms Mia Davies; Ms Libby Mettam; Dr David Honey; Mr Mark McGowan; Mr Roger Cook; Ms Rita Saffioti

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

Question put and passed.