

SUPPLY BILL 2020

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [5.07 pm]: Before we were so rudely interrupted by the coffee break, I had been discussing very briefly the difference between the various responses to coronavirus in other countries. I mentioned the target of maximum protection of people versus the maximum protection of the economy and the two responses around the world. The first is what is commonly called herd immunity—that is, to try to maximise the exposure of people as quickly as possible to build up the maximum amount of immunity possible. When vaccines are available, that is a fairly easy exercise because it means we can do so fairly safely. At the moment, those countries that are looking to maximise herd immunity to coronavirus are doing so by natural infection. That is, of course, a quite dangerous and risky process. The alternative to that is what is generally referred to as “flattening the curve”, which is the approach that is being taken by Australia in particular and which, in my view, has been reasonably successful to date. That means we try to slow down the rate of infection as much as possible, mostly by minimising exposure, effectively by reducing contact among people. By doing so, we slow down the rate of infection to a point at which new infections are manageable and it does not put too much pressure on the health system. There are pluses and minuses in each approach. Obviously, the maximum exposure and the herd immunity approach, which I understand was looked at by a few European countries at the start of this process, maximises the protection of the community in terms of exposure, but then has the greatest number of deaths and health impacts early on. When the curve is flattened, those impacts are spread further along the chain, so it takes the population longer to recover. Effectively, there will be more infections later rather than earlier. However, the advantage is that hopefully the incident rate allows the health system to manage and cope with the process. That is the one that Australian governments, both federal and state, are engaged in and, in my view, they are doing that quite successfully.

As we said before the break, the mortality rate of COVID-19 in Australia is running at about one per cent. Some areas took a slightly different approach. For example, of those people infected and tested in China, the mortality rate is around four per cent; in Iran it is six per cent; in Spain it is 4.7 per cent and in Italy it is eight per cent. There is obviously a specific advantage in taking the approach that the current state and federal governments have taken.

Before the break, I also mentioned briefly some of the behaviour that has been on display in the Australian community. Hopefully, it is a small percentage of the Australian community, but it reminds us all of the need to approach this in a fairly sensible manner. Hoarding does not help the response, it does not help the community and, in the end, it will not help individuals, but will just disadvantage people who are not in a position to do so, including the elderly and low-socioeconomic families. I walked into a shopping centre in Bunbury to take a photo —

Hon Colin Tincknell: Great spot, Bunbury!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is a great spot, of course.

I took a photograph of the empty toilet paper aisle. When I was doing so, I had to wait for a customer who was looking forlornly at the aisle with a trolley with a couple of kids in it and who was not hoarding toilet paper but could simply not get the requirement for the family she had. Her family was significantly disadvantaged, and I was struck at that point by the incredibly selfish nature that we fall to in times of trial. The “She’ll be right, mate” identity that Australians have always had is being sorely tested by some of the behaviours we see at the moment. As I mentioned, it reminds me a little of *Lord of the Flies*, but it reminds me also of the great poem *If* by Rudyard Kipling. It is a poem written from the perspective of a father to a son. The first lines read —

If you can keep your head when all about you

Are losing theirs and blaming it on you ...

That is a timely reminder: keep your head when others are not. That needs to be the focus we have. We need to get people thinking more rationally, not less rationally. That is particularly important.

That brings us to the bill before the house today and the importance of supply. This Parliament and governments, both state and federal, have a particularly important role to play. The Prime Minister and the Premier have said repeatedly that the behaviour of hoarding and the violence that has been associated with it are not acceptable, and I think have been described in both cases as un-Australian. Having the government and Parliament set a good example and demand a good standard of behaviour is important, as is the demonstration of supply, because in times of panic, anything that goes awry makes the situation significantly worse. It is absolutely essential that governments at both levels are able to continue their operation so that there is a degree of normality in the community. When we consider examples such as *Lord of the Flies*, we note that it is when governance breaks down that extreme activity and extreme behaviour starts to occur. It is critically important that the government makes sure that it is

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Stephen Dawson

providing the services that people require. That is not just about the finances and the bill we are discussing today, but also the intent of governments, state and commonwealth, to ensure that the community is adequately serviced.

That will not necessarily be easy. I live in the south west, which is a major provider of electricity for this state. Those power stations do not run with an excessive number of staff. It is not inconceivable that an entire shift of workers in an essential service such as electricity will suddenly need to spend 14 days in isolation and companies will attempt to maintain supply with skeleton crews, or one crew out of two doubling up on shifts. I urge the government to ensure that it is considering reserve capacity and looking at workforces to ensure that those essential services—electricity, water and sanitation—all continue to be provided.

Another important point is that this Parliament needs to set the same example that governments at the moment, both state and federal, are trying to set, and in Australia are doing so relatively successfully. For that reason, it is my personal view that unless coronavirus is detected in the Parliament of Western Australia, it is incumbent on us as leaders of the community to maintain as much normality in this process as we can. I understand that everyone at the Parliament of Queensland was sent home today. I came from Queensland. It is probably not a bad idea—politics is a little wild over there! I know that members are concerned about their own health and the health of their families; however, at some point it becomes incumbent upon us to keep our heads when all about us are losing theirs. If the Parliament decides to recess unusually, it is important that it does so for the best of reasons because the example that we, as a Parliament, set as leaders of our community will be repeated throughout the community. If we join those in panic and hysteria, our society and Western Australia will take a very long time to recover from that. My advice to members and my unbidden advice to the government and the minister is that we need to think very carefully about the examples that we display so that we are giving the best of ourselves and demonstrating the best behaviour; otherwise, we will be hypocrites. Of course, as part of that process, the Liberal opposition will no doubt continue to hold the government to account, as well as supporting the government in those things that need to be done to keep the community as safe as possible. It would be easy for me to make comments, but I will continue to hold the government to account on the questions asked both yesterday and today—because I do not think that excusing the government of scrutiny does us any good—as part of that role of continuing what we need to do, continuing that stability and leading by example. It would be very easy to make cheap political points about the process.

I finish with this comment, because I do not want to take too long on this bill: I hope to see it pass through this place rapidly. Both the federal government and the state government have done a good job to date with the management of the health risks of coronavirus infection in Australia. There is obviously more that they will do. We can expect more change as time goes by. The next six months will be critical. My view is that the community will develop a degree of coronavirus fatigue over time; that is, the constant coverage, the constant fear and the constant hysteria will eventually wear us down to a point at which we become somewhat blasé. I suspect that that will be around September–October this year. By that stage, we might start to see some recovery in normal behaviour and some recovery in the economic circumstances of this state. In the meantime, I repeat what I said before the afternoon break: we cannot save all the people and save all the economy. If we believe that we can do that, we are kidding ourselves. The community needs to accept that ultimately there will be deaths and there will be economic impacts. There will be increased unemployment. There will be costs; people will lose their jobs and some people will lose their businesses. In that process, it is not the government's fault, be it commonwealth or state. Both levels of government have an obligation to mitigate the damage as much as possible, but we seem to have come in recent years and decades to the position that everything that goes wrong is the government's fault and it is always the government's responsibility to fix it. I think we are going to see a very good example in 2020 of reality overtaking political perception. In those circumstances, there is an important role for this Parliament and this house to lead and to continue to meet and to look after the interests of the people of Western Australia. The opposition will support the bill today.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [5.19 pm]: I rise today to speak on the Supply Bill 2020 on behalf of the Greens, and acknowledge that we will be supporting this bill, but I would like to say a few things first. This bill has been brought on because of the uncertainty about the spread and intensity of the coronavirus. It is very difficult for us to determine what may happen or what will happen. We are ahead of the game, so we can look at what is happening in other countries and respond appropriately, and in some cases take steps well before they may have taken steps.

I understand that there are currently 500 cases of COVID-19 in Australia. That number is doubling every four days, so, in two weeks when we come back, there will be 4 000 cases across Australia. We need to think about that. It does not look as though we will be able to curtail this any time soon. The best we can hope for is a very slow rise in numbers so that our facilities and our healthcare system can work with the number of people who will be coming into our hospitals. If 4 000 people are infected now, members can do the maths and work out what the numbers will be like in May when we come back after the April break. It could slow us down. It could shut us down. As

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Stephen Dawson

Hon Dr Steve Thomas has just said, Queensland has shut down its Parliament. The thing is that when we talk about closing something for a week, two weeks or four weeks, or whatever, a lot of people around the state think that sounds great, but if we think about it and see what is happening overseas, it will not be for a couple of weeks but maybe four to six months. As we come out of winter, maybe then we will be able to get a bit more of a handle on how to stop the spread of it and be able to deal with it, and we will start to develop immunity within the people who have had it and have gotten over it, in some cases with very few symptoms.

It is usual that the budget is approved by the end of June. I can understand why the government needs to bring on this bill, because there is a potential that Parliament will not be back in time to pass the budget. That happened in 2017, which was an election year, and the budget did not come on until September, so we had to do the same thing and bring in an early Supply Bill to make sure that funds were available to enable the normal work of government to continue—paying the staff, doing building work, continuing development, and meeting all the other costs that governments have.

The government has said that because this bill is just a precautionary measure should we not be able to come back and pass the budget in the normal course of events, it will not proclaim it unless that is necessary. With the normal budget system, there is a two-month lead time into the next year so that if the budget is late in getting passed, the government can continue to pay staff and meet all its other costs until 31 August. This bill does not need to be proclaimed unless it appears that we will not be able to pass the budget before 31 August, and it will provide the government with the funds to take us through roughly until December, with the very strong belief that we will be back here before December. It is very hard to determine the future, but I would say that that will be possible, and, if it is not, I am sure we will find some way of having Parliament via technology online somehow.

The PRESIDENT: We are not actually able to do that, just so you do not get excited about the opportunity, sadly.

Hon DIANE EVERS: It will be interesting, then. But I believe we will be back before then.

The other thing with this bill is that it is equal to 50 per cent of the appropriations for the 2019–20 year, given that it is to take us through to December. That seems to make sense. The consumer price index has not been too high. Although we will be expending considerable funding through the healthcare system and other areas that might come up somewhat unexpectedly because of this virus, other things will probably be curtailed because of the pulling back in the amount of other works that might be able to happen.

I really appreciate the financial acumen that this government has exhibited in managing the finances so that we are not in dire straits right now. In fact, we are very far from dire straits, given that in the past six-month period we showed a surplus of \$2.3 billion. That is fabulous. Whatever the reasons for it, there was a surplus. I am really pleased to see that. I really believe that the idea of putting money away for a rainy day makes a lot of sense. This is our rainy day. This is the time. This is why we have put away that money, so that when the population calls on the government to do something, we are in a position in which we can do something. That is what is necessary. We need to make sure that those funds go to the right place, at the right time, to do the right things that need to happen. I recognise that with this budget we could have done other things, such as pay off debt or put it into a future fund, but paying for the past or paying for the future are nice luxuries we can have when we do good things, but not in a time of crisis, and we are in a time of crisis. All we need to do is look at what is happening in other countries to see that that is where we could be going very soon. We are talking about a couple of weeks. What happens after that? We are not sure. It will be a measure of how well our social distancing or physical distancing—that 1.5 metre gap between people—has worked and how well the precautions that we have put in place have worked.

Our current situation, with the impending greatest challenge to our health services that I think any of us have ever experienced, is occurring at a time when homelessness is increasing, mental health issues are rising, domestic violence continues to be a sorry reflection on our communities, and closing the gap on expectations for Aboriginal health remains a distant target. We find ourselves in that enviable situation of having a strong financial position to address the needs in our community without sending the state further into debt and not having to cut back on other services. So now, all the best ideas must be put forward. I am sure this is what the government is working on, and I appreciate the measures that have been taken so far. But there are a lot of difficult decisions ahead, and we have to work through what the repercussions of taking those actions or not taking those actions will be. Then we have to go forward. We must look at who will be hit the hardest by this and ensure that we put supports in place as soon as possible. As I said, we are probably already looking at this. The government is on to it. But I cannot express how urgent this is. It is not as though we can wait until tomorrow to make some decisions. Some things need to be done today. We need to work out where those crises will occur and address them before they become insurmountable. We know that for people who contract the disease and present to hospital, yes, obviously that will be one place—the hospitals will have to figure out how they can address all the people coming in with pneumonia and other symptoms, and try to keep the healthcare workers available and able and healthy themselves. I understand a Facebook site already has something like 15 000 people joining it, saying they want to help support the healthcare workers. That will be necessary. If schools close and those healthcare workers have children, they will need someone to look

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Stephen Dawson

after them. The normal day care centres may not be able to do that either, because putting 30 young children in a room together who share everything is just not going to work. So, we have to be able to help those healthcare workers and the hospitals and make sure they are staffed, funded and resourced—everything—to the best that we can afford.

I understand that people with disabilities are not able to access their necessary services and are finding it difficult to maintain the necessary social distancing. Some of this can be a federal issue, but those people are in our state and we need to look after them, too. We have to make sure that we are working with the federal government on this. I do not have a high expectation—well, I do have high expectations of our federal government. It needs to come along and ensure that people with disabilities get the services and the supports they need at this time of crisis. There may be people who lose their source of income and can no longer make their mortgage payments or pay their rent, buy food, or pay for their utilities. Maybe steps can be taken to ensure that people who are renting and lose their ability to pay the rent will not be evicted. Steps will have to be put in place. We cannot have landlords evicting people when they are already very stressed, especially if they are trying to do self-isolation. It is just not going to work. From a state government point of view, I understand that the energy assistance package was increased. There is also the hardship utility grant scheme. I cannot imagine that the government is going to try to cut off somebody's power, gas or water in the next six to 12 months. That would make no sense at all. We have to make sure that all the people of WA are looked after, and if they are not able to pay their bills, we have to find something to put in place so that they can continue to live their life in as healthy a manner as possible.

We also have people with mental health issues who find themselves self-isolated, on their own and without social contact. I have already heard that some communities are looking to try to support people. I know this is not a stand-in for the process of appropriate medical support, but the government could go through local governments or local community groups and help those groups that provide support to neighbours, friends, others they know on their street, people down the block, families and extended families. They can check in on people and give them support so that they know where to go if they become distressed or need medical attention. We cannot just look after ourselves. Everyone in here is in a position in which we can provide more for people other than just ourselves. That is what we need to bolster in our communities. If someone is capable of it, they should help others out too. It is no longer the time to just look after ourselves. It just will not work.

There are people in abusive relationships—possibly with young children and possibly experiencing financial distress—and additional services must be set up to ensure that abuse does not happen when a family is self-isolating or trying to remain at a physical distance from everybody. It is understood that in times of stress, domestic violence and abuse increases. We also know that globally, with the coming climate change, the effects will hit women first and hardest. This virus will do the same thing, because it puts women in positions in which they are compromised and not able to be as assertive or defend themselves as well as they might like. These are the people who need immediate and ongoing care and support. That is what I am hoping this government can step in to do. I will get to the economy. We need to keep the economy going well, and getting funds into the hands of the people who are neediest is the best way to help the economy, because that makes it spread around many more times.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: You mean the trickle-down effect.

Hon DIANE EVERS: The trickle-down effect does not work. Exactly! Thank you for that.

Yesterday, New Zealand announced a \$12 billion package that includes a payment of \$585 a week for 12 weeks as a jobs guarantee to support small business so that they do not have to lay off their employees and put people out of work. A number of members have mentioned being in the shops recently and seeing empty shelves. We are talking about grocery shopping. Try going into a furniture store or a car dealer, or to buy other larger ticket items that we consider discretionary. There is not as much discretionary spending happening, including at restaurants. Those places will not be able to stay open. Many of them live month to month or so, making sure they get enough in to cover rent, staff wages and all the other costs. We will see some businesses shut down, and every time we see a business shut down, that is the end of the jobs for its staff as well. Maybe what New Zealand has done is the right thing and possibly Australia could do that. It is something we should be thinking about as well, because we have to get money into the hands of people who will spend it to assist the economy. Without such a stimulus, we will surely see not only thousands of job losses, but also small businesses collapse. There are 226 000 small business in WA. I do not know what proportion of those might go under, but I would imagine that of those 226 000, a number were possibly struggling before this virus came along. As far as I understand, the government has set up a hotline to support business owners who have questions about red tape. I am thinking that that is not a response to the virus. That must have been thought of beforehand and it is coming along, which is great, but a hotline is hardly something that someone will go to when their business is struggling to pay the rent and keep staff on. We need to have something considerably stronger than that.

As I have said, I am expecting more out of the federal government, but I am not holding my breath. We have to work with it. WA is in a really good financial situation, and WA will need to prop up these businesses, because

we do not always operate on the same schedule as the rest of Australia, as anybody who has gone through the last 10 years would know. We need to keep things going. Luckily, it seems as though the iron ore price and volumes are still high, but I would not expect that to continue for long. There will come a time when China may not need to keep topping up its stores. That is what we should be looking at. We need to get the best economists we have in here and get that crystal-ball gazing going on, because we need to work out what is going to happen so that we can stop it before it does. If it does happen, people cannot then say, “We didn’t need to do it”. If it does not happen, we just have to say, “Excellent. Isn’t that great? We did well; we got through this.” That is what I hope to see.

As I mentioned briefly yesterday, we are hearing farmers in the regions talk about where they are going to get their workers because there are no backpackers. I have an idea. I have talked about how a lot of people in the retail industry will be losing their jobs and how a lot of people are not going to the regions for jobs. I am not sure how we could match it up, but I suggest to the government that it take a look at that. Is there some sort of a plan or system that could be put in place to match up unemployed people in the cities who would like to live in the regions, get a job, have a place to live, have something to eat and maybe not even pay much rent, and we could keep our farms operating? Our farms are our food. Yes, the shops have been empty and we all expect that the shelves will be filled again by the next day or week, but that may not be the case in a month’s time if this keeps happening. It may be that a lot of our food that is imported does not come in. We need to keep growing our food here. That is something that we could somehow match up, so that we get unemployed people out into the regions.

Another group of people who I feel will be significantly financially impacted is the entire performance art industry. I do not have the answers, but we better find something soon. Maybe this is another area in which we can look to the stimulus package of New Zealand. The state could provide some sort of small weekly wage to pay performers and keep morale up, not only giving small groups of people an emotional boost by playing their music, but also knowing that the payment will go right back into the economy to support cafes and other local hospitality venues. We cannot meet in large groups, but would it be so bad if a few people were paid a small weekly wage to play some music from time to time? It would kind of be like busking, but more formalised, because they would put the money back into the economy. We need those performance arts people here. They are important to make people feel like things are not so strange. We have to keep a bit of normalcy, so that many people will not lose the social connections that we need.

As for infrastructure spending, rather than go down the line suggested by the Leader of the Opposition in the other house, who said, “Just construct Roe 8. That’ll be good—more road construction!” Wow; what a novel idea. Where did that one come from? That will not provide ongoing jobs, it will not reduce ongoing costs and it will not bring in revenue. It will barely stimulate the economy, so why not think more constructively and build something we desperately need? We could urgently build 1 000 low-cost homes for social housing across regional areas and in many areas of Perth where people are struggling and living on the streets. These people living on the streets are very susceptible to COVID-19. We are not providing anything to help them get through it. Of course, when they have it, many of the other people who pass them by will get it too. Why not build 1 000 new homes? The government could even employ those people to help build them and teach them the skills required. We can use the plantation pine that we grow here. Without as many of the fixtures and fittings coming in from China, we might even start some industries here. There is so much we could do, and building 1 000 homes would not only keep the construction industry going, but also employ more people and provide houses for people to live in so that we do not have so many homeless people when we come out of this, and we would minimise the spread of the disease.

Hon Jim Chown: How long did it take to build one of your homes?

Hon DIANE EVERS: I was getting to that. Okay, I will jump to that. How long would it take? I do not know whether members have heard—I am sure some of them have—that it took only 10 days to build a hospital in China. I have seen the video.

Hon Martin Aldridge: That’s been myth-busted.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Okay; whatever you want to believe. They built a hospital very quickly.

Hon Martin Aldridge: What’s your source. It’s not true.

Hon DIANE EVERS: Okay. A normal house can be built in 13 weeks, maybe even six weeks. We are not talking about the average normal house. We need small affordable houses in local areas. Houses can be built in a shed here and taken to the mining areas. It has been done. We have an industry and it can be upgraded. I hate hearing people saying, “No, it can’t be done”, because this disease is like nothing we have ever seen and we need to act soon. We have accepted homelessness when we know that not having a home is one of the biggest factors and not being able to find work often leads to mental illness and other issues. The rapid development of the small home construction industry could be distributed across the state and it would provide homes for homeless people.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Stephen Dawson

I suggest that we look outside the box, outside the square, at other areas. We should look at where the problems will happen. We acknowledge that this is a serious issue that is going to impact our state greatly. We need to take action now and use the funds that have accumulated and the surplus to make sure that the vulnerable in our society are looked after and cared for and that we continue to have the medical facilities and services available that we need to make sure that no-one is left behind. I recognise the seriousness of the Supply Bill 2020. I recognise that we do not expect these things to happen, but we need to be ready. I really hope that we are ready and that we take action soon.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [5.41 pm]: From the outset, I make it quite clear to the government that Pauline Hanson's One Nation fully supports the Supply Bill 2020. However, that does not mean that the government can sit back on its laurels and that it cannot do better than what it is doing. I acknowledge the homelessness package that was delivered before Christmas. I also acknowledge the payroll tax relief, the stamp duty rebates for property and construction, the maintenance packages for Western Australian schools and WA Health, the reduced TAFE fees and also the local support for tourism. I want to say well done to the government, but a lot of that—we can call it a stimulus or a boost—happened before the onset of coronavirus, the reason being that, compared with the other states, WA was going through a bad economic phase and was not performing very well. Those developments and announcements were very much needed at the time. Now the coronavirus is not only on our doorstep, it is happening in our community and the whole world is under pressure.

I congratulate Hon Dr Steve Thomas for what he said in his contribution; indeed, we need to be united on this issue. This is a time for Parliament to stand up. We can debate the little things, and we should because we need to have good honest debates and disagreements so that we can get the best results. In the end, the government has the responsibility to lead the state through this tough time. I wish the Premier and the Prime Minister of Australia all the best. This is a tough time for any government leader. Some good can come out of this over the next six to 12 months. It can galvanise the important things and the things that we have in common in this great state of WA. It can bring us together. The way we go about that and achieve those outcomes may be a bit different.

The Supply Bill 2020 has been called a stimulus package but I am not so sure that it is a stimulus package. To me it is more of a relief package. We have talked about the payroll tax reduction and how those who pay it will be advantaged. I asked a question in Parliament yesterday about small businesses and the mum-and-dad businesses because they make up the majority of businesses in this state. They are the ones that will find it hard to operate and may have to close up shop. Some mothers and fathers will have to take their kids out of school because of whatever. That is their personal decision. We do not want that because it will restrict the number of doctors and nurses in our society. Truck drivers and people stacking shelves at IGAs are all very important to what is going on right now with the coronavirus. Is this a relief package? There was much talk of an increase in the cost of household utilities, such as energy, but now the government is not going to make those increases. This is more of a relief package than a stimulus package. The government has reduced payroll tax for a number of businesses, but what about small vulnerable businesses? We need an answer for them. I urge the government to keep working on that. They will get our support in every way.

At times the government is so proud of its effort to bring in a surplus that it is a bit scared to spend some of that surplus. Now is the time; the rainy day is here. I know that the savings made by the government have been hard earned, but now is the time to give Western Australians that stimulus, and to give even more than what has been given. I applaud what the government has done, but I would like to see a lot more. I would like to see a relief effort made in mortgages, rents and leases. The small businesses that will not do well will still have to pay their mortgages, rents and leases. It is not an easy one, but the government should work with these businesses and the banks to see whether we can achieve some relief in that area. It is very important because it is pretty hard for a person to come back from losing their job, their wage, their store or business and their house. They may end up on the streets with other homeless people. We do not want to add to the list of homeless people in WA. We must act very quickly before people reach that stage.

As I mentioned before, COVID-19 will not go away quickly. Although initiatives are being taken now, we need to continue to think about what else we can do. We understand why schools have remained open and why flights between states still need to happen. It may reach the stage at which schools have to close and those airline services will have to wind down. That will mean that the government will need to be flexible and ready to spend some of its surplus when it is needed most, which is right now.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [5.49 pm]: The Supply Bill 2020 is basically an insurance policy that the government has put forward in case we are unable to pass our budget in May. The state still needs to provide finances and keep the lights on, as they say, and so this bill provides those funds. The COVID-19 virus for us is, of course, uncharted waters. As Hon Dr Steve Thomas pointed out, in history, we have had events like the Spanish flu, World Wars and Depressions, but for us in the chamber, and for this generation, we have not come across something like this, and it is unfolding on a daily basis. It is a little unfortunate that the 24-hour news cycle and social media have caused a degree of hysteria and irrational behaviour. If members go to supermarkets, certain product lines are

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Stephen Dawson

completely stripped out. I went to a supermarket this morning and the toilet paper aisle was stripped bare. It makes me wonder where all the stuff is going and what the hell people are even using it for!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: We could draw you a picture.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! That is possibly the most unruly interjection I have ever heard.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Today I heard that Harvey Norman has had a run on chest freezers, and it has just about run out of its supply of those, because people have to find somewhere to put their hoarded goods.

The COVID-19 virus is something that we have to deal with as time goes on. I certainly think that this bill is a good idea as an insurance policy. Maybe the government will not need to use it, maybe it will, but at least it is there for us to use. I note with interest the amount that the Supply Bill will provide for, which is a total of \$13 638 632 000. The amount for recurrent services will be \$11 501 021 500 and for capital purposes it will be \$2 137 610 500. It gives me great comfort that when it comes to supply, Treasury is able to analyse this down to the last \$500. In any case, the money will be available if need be. I certainly support this bill. Hopefully, we will not require it and we can go through the normal budget process.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [5.52 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Nationals WA to indicate that we, too, will be supporting the Supply Bill 2020. I note that it is in the best interests of the house, the government and the people of Western Australia that the bill passes this evening, and I want to make a short contribution on this issue. As the members who have spoken before me have said, it is very important that the last thing that we would want to see during this public health emergency that is facing the world, not just Australia or Western Australia, is our government running out of money. That would be far worse than the situation we are dealing with at the moment, a very public health emergency across the world.

Some people—not in this place, but in the other place—have said that introducing this Supply Bill is a rather extraordinary move. I am not sure whether it is that extraordinary. Since we have had fixed elections in the state of Western Australia, if I am not mistaken, for every budget after a general election, we have a Supply Bill. The reason we have a Supply Bill is that the budget, which is usually handed down in May, has always been, since fixed elections, much later in that year. Therefore, to that extent, I am not sure whether it is that extraordinary.

I want to talk specifically about the bill briefly and then a couple of other issues more generally about our preparedness over the next few months. The second reading speech that was delivered by the Leader of the House on behalf of Hon Stephen Dawson yesterday says that the \$13.639 billion amount in the Supply Bill 2020 is based on 50 per cent of the appropriations approved by the Parliament for the 2019–20 financial year. I had a quick look at the 2019–20 appropriations bills of which there are two—a recurrent bill and a capital bill. The Appropriation (Capital 2019–20) Bill was \$2.644 billion, and the Appropriation (Recurrent 2019–20) Bill was \$20.316 billion, or a total of \$22.96 billion. Half of \$22.96 billion is \$11.48 billion, so I am wondering whether the minister can clarify that point for me when he delivers his second reading speech in reply. I think that there are times when governments can extend beyond an appropriation if it receives validation after the fact—perhaps that is the instance. I am not aware of another appropriations bill that passed in 2019–20, or perhaps my maths does not add up. Perhaps that is something that the minister could look at in the short time that we have, with the advisers that he has with him today, just for some factual clarity on that matter. It is not going to change the way that we vote in the second or third reading.

It has been said, although I do not think I have heard it in the debate today, unless I have missed it, that there are provisions in the Financial Management Act 2006, namely section 24, that allow the Treasurer of the state power to authorise an appropriation on 1 July if an appropriations bill has not passed for any given year, and it must not exceed an amount that equals 20 per cent of the total amount appropriated for the previous year by the appropriations acts. Obviously, those provisions, I think, are enacted fairly regularly, because it is not often that we have appropriations bills passed by 30 June each year—in fact, it is probably the case that the section 24 provisions of the FMA are enacted by the Treasurer every year and so it is quite routinely used. The concern is that it would provide only 20 per cent of this year's appropriations and would expire two months after 1 July 2020. Obviously, two things would need to be considered. One is that we might need more than 20 per cent of this year's appropriations in the first two months of the next financial year—that could be one scenario—or, indeed, the Parliament is not able to pass a new set of appropriations bills prior to 1 September 2020. Those are the two scenarios that could arise. In considering this bill, I would like to know from the minister: is it the plan of the state to use the section 24 provisions and then, if required, use the power that would be available to the Treasurer on the proclamation of this bill; or will it just go straight to this bill and proclaim it on 1 July, rather than use the section 24 provisions at all? It would be good to get some clarity around those two areas.

I have other things that I want to talk about. We do not have a lot of time left, so I do not want to speak extensively, but there will be another occasion when we talk about the health and economic response. Time will not allow for that today, and I do not think that it is the right occasion to have that debate in full, except to say that the National Party will stand with the government through this very difficult period to make sure that what we are saying is responsible,

measured and in proportion to the enormous challenge that lies ahead in the weeks and months, if not years, to come, with respect to the situation that is developing internationally.

Before I conclude, I will make a few remarks about the operation of the Parliament going forward. Obviously, this is a bill to make sure that money continues to flow in the absence of Parliament sitting. It is predicted that we will see supply until probably the later stages of this calendar year. That may be revised, depending upon the expenditure that is required in the next few months as the government responds. However, as I understand it, there are some limitations for the Legislative Council. There are two things I want to talk about today. When I woke up this morning thinking about this Supply Bill and what I was going to say, the next thing that I thought about was what will happen in the Legislative Council. We go into a recess tomorrow afternoon, we have a week off, we are scheduled to come back for a week thereafter, and then we go into the winter recess, as I understand it. As members will be aware, I have taken some interest this term in standing order 6 and particularly 6(3), which is the recall provisions of the house. I pointed out to the house in an earlier debate that standing order 6(3) allows the President, on the request of the Leader of the House and after consultation with the leaders of all parties, to vary the day and time at which the Council will next meet. Some people held the view that that should only be interpreted to mean that we can recall the house; it does not mean that we can postpone the house. I think I argued at the time that on a plain reading of standing order 6(3), it allows the President on the request of the Leader of the House to do both things. That may well be a provision that needs to be enacted during any period of recess—not just the week that is coming up, but, indeed, the winter recess, during which there may be practical reasons why the Legislative Council may not be able to sit on the dates tabled by the Leader of the House at the end of 2019. I just draw members' attention to that point. Earlier today, I thought that perhaps a special adjournment motion might be required tomorrow afternoon to enable the President to make such decisions; however, on reflection of standing order 6(3), I think there is sufficient scope for the President, at the request of the Leader of the House, to make appropriate decisions on that.

Another issue that was raised earlier in the debate was whether or not the house could or should sit in a virtual sense. I am drawn to some limitations in section 14 of the Constitution Acts Amendment Act 1899 titled “Quorum — division, casting vote”. For the benefit of members, section 14 reads —

The presence of at least one-third of the members of the Legislative Council, exclusive of the President, shall be necessary to constitute a quorum for the despatch of business; and all questions which shall arise in the Legislative Council shall be decided by a majority of votes of the members present, other than the President, and when the votes are equal the President shall have the casting vote:

Provided always, that if the whole number of members constituting the Legislative Council shall not be exactly divisible by 3, the quorum of the Legislative Council shall consist of such whole number as is next greater than one-third of the members of the Legislative Council.

Members know that the first thing that occurs at the beginning of each sitting day is that a quorum needs to be present for that sitting day to continue. Obviously, the word “present” presents some difficulty in sitting by another means. That may be something that, in due course, may need to be considered in not only this place, but also the other place, when considering our preparedness to deal with situations like this. I really hope it will not be the case that the Legislative Council or the other place will be in a position in which they cannot sit through an inability to form a quorum, because, obviously, having a legislature able to respond as well as the government to the rising needs of a public health emergency will be important.

With those few words in the time that has been available to me this afternoon, I indicate to the government that we will support the Supply Bill 2020 and we will continue to support the government in the difficult weeks and months ahead.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [6.03 pm] — in reply: Thank you, Mr Deputy President, and I thank all honourable members who made a contribution to the debate this afternoon on the Supply Bill 2020—that is, Hon Dr Steve Thomas on behalf of the opposition, Hon Diane Evers, Hon Colin Tincknell, Hon Rick Mazza and Hon Martin Aldridge. I really appreciate their support and the comments they provided to the house on this bill.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas gave a fairly sombre analysis of the risks associated with COVID-19 and really put it into perspective. Certainly, I recognise that there are current challenges and there will be challenges ahead of us. I think he made the point well that we need to think carefully about the examples that we give as members of Parliament, and, indeed, as a Legislative Council and Parliament of Western Australia. The state and federal governments are in lock step on this issue. Obviously, the Prime Minister and the Premier are in regular contact, and, of course, the Premier is a member of the national cabinet that has been established by the Prime Minister with leaders of the various states and territories on this issue. Every action we take and every decision we make on this issue is to protect Western Australians. I think it is important to make that point: this is about the protection of Western Australians.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Martin Aldridge; Hon Stephen Dawson

I acknowledge the contribution of Hon Diane Evers. I indicate that decisions being made are evidence based, but, certainly, I appreciate her acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issue that we face at the moment. I will certainly put the best wishes of Hon Colin Tincknell to the Premier and bring them to his attention. As he quite rightly pointed out, over \$607 million has been allocated for stimulus packages thus far. The government continues to monitor the economy and we will act again if and when it is needed. We all need to continue to support local businesses and each other as we continue to manage the impacts of this virus.

I thank Hon Rick Mazza for his contribution. As he said, this bill is essentially an insurance policy as we proceed to deal with COVID-19. Hon Martin Aldridge made the point that it is in the best interests of the people of Western Australia that the bill is passed. I thank him for that; I agree with him. He asked me to clarify the 50 per cent. I have been provided with a copy of the speech I delivered, but it is actually a copy of a speech that the Treasurer delivered last year in the other place, which refers to recurrent service estimates of just upwards of \$23 billion, including a sum permanently appropriated under special acts, leaving an amount of \$20.3 billion to be appropriated in the manner shown in the schedule to the Appropriation (Recurrent 2019–20) Bill 2019—so that is that extra. Then, in relation to the Appropriation (Capital 2019–20) Bill 2019, which is for capital purposes, there are capital purposes and financing transaction estimates of \$4.275 billion that comprise a sum of \$1.63 billion permanently appropriated under special acts, and an amount of \$2.644 billion that is to be appropriated in the manner shown in the schedule to the Appropriation (Capital 2019–20) Bill 2019. If we add those two amounts together, the bill before us allows for the 50 per cent amount that is referred to in the second reading speech.

To answer Hon Martin Aldridge's second question—whether it was our intention to use section 24 of the Financial Management Act or go straight to this—I think we have the flexibility to do both. I think we will deal with that issue as we need to.

Certainly, on what the Legislative Council may well do, party leaders hold a regular meeting, which I attend as a deputy, on the first Tuesday of a sitting block. At our last meeting, the President and the Clerk of the Council came along and provided us an update of where things were at for the Legislative Council. Obviously, they have written to us since then. I certainly think it is the intention that those briefings will occur again with the leaders of the parties as we progress. Certainly, any future decision of the Council would be disseminated to parties through that process.

Again, I thank honourable members for their contributions to this debate. It is an important one. As Hon Dr Steve Thomas quite rightly pointed out, there are dark days ahead, but certainly it is incumbent on us to work together collectively in the best interests of Western Australians as we work through the virus.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Leave granted to proceed forthwith to third reading.

Third Reading

Bill read a third time, on motion by **Hon Stephen Dawson (Minister for Environment)**, and passed.