

**CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

*Motion*

**HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [10.18 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house urges the McGowan government to —

- (a) justify why and on what grounds it has abandoned a COVID-19 suppression strategy in favour of an elimination strategy;
- (b) regularly publish official information, including public health information, underpinning all of its major COVID-19 decisions;
- (c) permit key officials, including the Chief Health Officer and the Commissioner of Police, to regularly brief the public on COVID-19 matters;
- (d) explain apparent inconsistencies with quarantine exemptions granted over the course of the pandemic;
- (e) table its plan for, and advise its preparedness to manage, a potential second wave outbreak; and
- (f) respect Western Australians suffering isolation from their loved ones located throughout Australia and overseas.

**The PRESIDENT:** Hon Tjorn Sibma has moved the motion standing in his name. I am just waiting for the members in the back to finish their conversation before we move on.

**Hon TJORN SIBMA:** At the outset, I confess to having made an error in paragraph (a) of this motion. The terms I have expressed refer to strategies pursued in the management of COVID-19. We might all recall that, initially, the strategy was quite explicit. The strategy was about suppression to flatten or crush the curve to establish capacity in the health system to accommodate what was then anticipated to be a significant wave of patients suffering from COVID-19. That was done so that the health system could cope with that onslaught. That strategy was explicit, clear and drove a set of actions that everyone could comprehend. It was successful in eliciting the level of community support, participation and cooperation that was necessary to make it effective because everyone understood the strategy and knew the consequential range of actions that came out of that strategy.

Sometime over the course of the pandemic, the strategy seems to have changed—never explicitly, but in tone and scope—and we got insights into the potential change in strategy whenever the next national cabinet meeting was on the horizon. An interesting disclosure was made by the police commissioner in a radio interview, I think last week, on 6PR. Effectively, in the exchange between the host of the program, Gareth Parker, and the police commissioner, the police commissioner was asked to explain the rationale underpinning the hard border policy. The police commissioner intimated that, effectively, Western Australia was pursuing an elimination strategy. He said, basically, that all signs were pointing to that, so people could, effectively, draw their own conclusions. Many observers had drawn that conclusion themselves, but it had never been disclosed to that degree. One might reflect on whether it is appropriate for the police commissioner to set those kinds of policies and to advise the public of that strategy in such a comfortable—I will not say cavalier—and almost informal manner, because it has never been officially declared that we are pursuing an elimination strategy. I thought that was what the government was doing until I read the paper this morning.

There now seems to be another strategy—one which is intimating that we might be in a position to establish travel bubbles. That came from evidence provided by the Chief Health Officer, Dr Robertson. I find this concept interesting, because it not only obviously diverges from the advice that the police commissioner has given and the public utterances of the Premier around the time of the last national cabinet meeting, but also suggests an action plan that we were previously advised was unconstitutional. When the Leader of the Opposition, Hon Liza Harvey, had the temerity to suggest that perhaps the government could consider the establishment of a travel bubble between COVID-safe jurisdictions in Australia, she was howled down for all kinds of reasons, but one of the justifications that the Premier used was that such a concept was unconstitutional. In passing, I make the observation that I have never been particularly astounded by the Premier's consistency on constitutional matters. That has not been a feature of his premiership. Nevertheless, an explanation is owed to not only us in this chamber, but also the public at large about what has changed. I can tell members that the Constitution has not changed in the course of this crisis or over the course of the last week. What now justifies this change in strategy?

I confess to having made an error at the beginning of this address. My error was to state that there is an elimination strategy in Western Australia at the moment. I think it is fair to say that there is no clear strategy, save, potentially, a political strategy that seeks to harness COVID-19 for all it is worth in electoral terms. I think the Premier has established a pattern of behaviour that substantiates that accusation—put, as it is, in moderated terms. That is why I have sought in paragraphs (b) and (c) of the motion before the house for the government to provide the information.

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In recent days, in response to questions from Hon Peter Collier concerning the disclosure of health advice, the Leader of the House reflected that, I think, on two solitary occasions in the course of the past six months, the government has felt obligated to provide this chamber with the health advice it claims to have relied upon in the establishment of its strategy—that is, the health advice that underpins the so-called hard border. I will speak to the myth of the hard border when I get the opportunity.

On two solitary occasions, wads of material have been tabled in Parliament and we are apparently supposed to feel satisfied with that contribution. The environment, the response, to COVID-19 and the import of government decisions—as they relate to the restrictions of liberty, the cancellation of events, the upheaval in personal life and the dislocation and isolation of Western Australian families—demand, insofar as practicable, real-time disclosure of unadulterated, uncensored, non-politically filtered public health information. The best way to do that is to let loose the Chief Health Officer, Dr Robertson. I make the observation that the practice in other Australian jurisdictions, whether it be in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales or even at the commonwealth level, has been for Chief Health Officers to regularly be made available to the media and the public. They are public figures and part of the public discourse. People look up to them because they realise that the information is being provided through a clinically precise and professional lens. There is no political filter or minister up front providing caveats and, potentially, cherry-picking information. They are up-front and can answer questions from the media. That has not been the practice in Western Australia over the past six months. Dr Robertson is a man who is difficult to pin down and find, unless he is presenting evidence to a parliamentary committee. I cannot recall the last time that gentleman was made available to the public in a way that facilitated questions and answers in an extensive fashion. I think that has been to the detriment of Western Australia because it has allowed myths to circulate. The myth I want to refer to is the myth of the hard border. There is no hard border but there are hard border controls. I think there is a distinction. May I say that I first cut my teeth in political terms as a border security adviser to the Howard government. Without providing myself with any acclaim, I doubt there is a person who was harder on borders in this chamber than me. There is not. I speak here of unauthorised boat arrivals—a real hard national border. I know that does not make me some friends in this chamber but I at least speak on the concept of borders with some measure of authority.

When I look at movements in and out of Western Australia over the past six months, through the border, one could not say that it is impenetrable. There have been at least 40 000 movements through the border during that time. It is difficult to ascertain precise numbers but it is around that figure. It has never been disputed by the government, and the government is actually reluctant to provide information. By way of comparison, around 40 000 people have moved through the Western Australian border over the last six months—around 450 to 500 people a day. They are FIFO workers, truck drivers, essential workers and others that I might get to, particularly notable individuals who are probably more special than other members of this community. During this crisis, 40 000 people have moved through the border. I do not think that is comprehended by most Western Australians. Most Western Australians do not think anybody is getting in. That is not true. That is patently false. By way of historical example, during the 28 years of the Berlin Wall, only 5 000 people escaped. There were 5 000 escapes during 30 years of the Berlin Wall—a real hard border—compared with 40 000 movements in and out of Western Australia during the last six months. Let us be accurate. Let us use this as an opportunity to bust some myths. The more we do that, the more we might be able to shine some light on the seriousness and the facts of this situation and start to give Western Australian individuals, families and businesses a sense of what might be coming next and how we might manage our way back to some level of normalcy.

That leads me to paragraph (d) of this motion. I will not dwell on this and abuse the privileges of speaking in this chamber. But I might just make the observation that it does not appear in the state of Western Australia that all men, women and children are created equal when it comes to their capacity to move back into Western Australia or to absolve themselves from quarantine. This is a question that has been posed not only by the opposition, but also by other parties in this chamber and in the other one. We have heard pleas to the Minister for Police and the Premier for the police department to provide the datasets. The last opportunity we did so in this chamber, we were told that the government's measurement matrix or its program to calculate this information had changed and it would be a gross inconvenience on the people compiling that to provide this chamber with the information. The Commissioner of Police appeared before a committee of the other place yesterday. He was asked to provide the data and did not bring it. I find it very difficult to believe that a police commissioner of his competence and professionalism does not have that data available to him. I wonder whether he is operating on instructions not to provide that information. This is my thesis: in the absence of clear, unambiguous official information from the government, I believe that he has been told not to provide it. If he did, the inconsistencies would be laid bare—the kind of inconsistencies that do not even treat all billionaires as being equal.

In Western Australia and Australia, some billionaires are more equal than others. Far be it for me to make the observation that the person who seems to have freedom of movement in this state is the same gentleman who runs the biggest media organisation in this state and can provide the Premier with unfettered adulation and seven-page

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spreads at leadership breakfasts. Objectively, we may say that here is a gentleman who is probably very healthy; nevertheless, he came here from destinations that have COVID outbreaks. Here he was chumming up to the Premier at a breakfast. The Premier is a public figure. He speaks to his cabinet colleagues and his caucus colleagues. He comes to this place and he meets with members of the community. That does not seem to me to be the most risk-averse management approach to treating claims or requests for exemption. It is clear, and everybody in Western Australia knows it.

Why do we have a special forces operator who served this country in Afghanistan, East Timor and other destinations stranded with his family in the United Arab Emirates with absolutely no prospect of returning to Western Australia? There does not seem to be a consistent answer. I think we demand a consistent answer. If we are to be all in this together, as we have been told and as we have been mollified, well, then prove that we are all in this together, because I do not think we are. No-one believes it. No-one with any critical faculties believes that there is one universal rule for all. There is not.

May I jump over a paragraph. I will get to paragraph (e) but I want to address paragraph (f). If this motion is about anything, it is about respect—respect for people’s intelligence, respect for the principles of equality, respect for people’s lives, respect in behaviour and respect in language. In recent days, there have been a lot of hurt feelings. There seems to be an outbreak of emotional damage. Very, very senior people in this country are upset about mean words said to one another. I will make no comment on that, suffice to say that strong leadership has not been set from the top. When the Premier of this state can attempt to wriggle off the hook and say, “We don’t want to take more Western Australians into hotel quarantine, Western Australia does not want to be a dumping ground for Western Australians attempting to come back to Australia”, he is calling every stranded Western Australian a piece of rubbish because that is what you dump. He did that deliberately. If there is one truth about this Premier, it is that he is a politically clever operator. There is no looseness in his language. We can take objection to it but he is a controlled political beast. He knows what he is doing. I have seen this kind of language before. I think the Premier needs to be very careful about defamation actions because if he establishes a precedent, I might take objection to being called a terrorist in another matter. Language is important. The treatment of people is important.

I might make a personal disclosure. My cousin is a worker in the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. She had COVID-19. Her colleagues died from COVID. Is my cousin, who is pregnant and who might want to come back with her partner to Western Australia, a piece of rubbish? According to the Premier, she is. This is shameful. I say to government members that they should grow a spine and confront their leader because he is doing the wrong thing. He is politicising this crisis for all it is worth—a crisis that is now largely confected.

**HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [10.40 am]:** I stand to comment on the motion of Hon Tjorn Sibma. It is a very good and pertinent motion. COVID-19 is, of course, a global pandemic that has had massive detrimental impacts internationally, physically and economically. It is how we deal with it that is absolutely imperative. Yes, accolades have been bestowed on the Premier and the government for dealing with it in an effective manner in Western Australia, and, to a large degree, they are relevant and pertinent. Having said that, things are starting to shift and change because questions are being asked. This is a global pandemic, so globally we look at ways in which we can deal with the pandemic. The unanimous consensus was that we had to deal with it in a pragmatic fashion. We were told about flattening the curve so that we could reduce community outbreaks and having sophisticated tracing techniques so that we could deal with it in a pragmatic fashion. Until there is a vaccine, that virus will be with us. We will live with it. Do we live with the virus or do we become cocooned and isolate ourselves for one, two or five years—however long it takes? Is that what it is going to take? It will be a vaccine that ultimately gets rid of the thing, but in the interim we must learn to live with it.

It appears that the notion of flattening the curve and dealing with it has gone out the window for the government. That is concerning for the medium to long-term future for literally hundreds of thousands of Western Australians who are suffering at the moment. Of course, it is all based on the premise that we have adequate health facilities, particularly for the elderly, that can deal with this virus. That is what we have to look at. The federal government is pouring over \$9 billion into JobKeeper and JobSeeker to assist people whose employment has been affected by the pandemic. In addition, a number of grants have been provided to residents, businesses et cetera. However, the impact on the tourism and hospitality sectors has been extraordinarily detrimental. Ultimately, JobKeeper and JobSeeker will be removed, as will the grants and subsidies. In a way, it is a bit like putting a bandaid on a broken arm: it solves the problem in the short term and the optics are good, but ultimately we have to deal with it in a much more long-term fashion. That is what we must do. At the moment, we are not doing that. When Chris Dawson, the Commissioner of Police, was asked on the Gareth Parker program last week what the solution was, he said that the way he would respond to that was by saying that all of us—everyone—want to see a vaccine. That is true—we do. We desperately want a vaccine, but on the very real prospect that we do not have a vaccine for months and months, or years, we must think about where we are going. At the moment, we have fortress Western Australia. That is what the government wanted and that is what the government said.

**Extract from *Hansard***

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 24 September 2020]

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Hon Tjorn Sibma; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Aaron Stonehouse; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Alanna Clohesy; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Pierre Yang; Hon Michael Mischin

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As an opposition, we have done what Her Majesty's loyal opposition should do—that is, scrutinise the government legitimately to try to find out what is happening with the people who are entering Western Australia from other states and jurisdictions, and nationally. That is our right. Quite frankly—this is when I endorse the comments of Hon Tjorn Sibma—the Premier has gone back to the default position over the past couple of months since the winter break. I challenge members in this chamber to look at *Hansard*. Every single legitimate question that we ask about the process or plan of the government is met with disdain and contempt. I assure members opposite that this is not a dictatorship. We are still a bicameral democratic system of government. It is our legitimate right to ask questions on this pandemic, because every day our offices are filled with thousands and thousands of people who are affected. People in the tourism and hospitality industries and in small business want to know where we are going. Knowledge is power. People feel secure and comfortable when they know what is going on. That is why the Premier is so popular at the moment. He is making decisions and he thinks he is on a winner with this. He knows he is on a winner with this. When he is sitting on a 90 per cent approval rate, he knows he is on a winner. However, that does not give him the right to treat this place with contempt and also to carry on with the nonsense he carries on with on a day-to-day basis with other states. He knows that he can chest beat all he likes. He knows that it will be popular out there, but, really, is that a plan?

I will give some examples of just some of his comments in the media when talking about the borders. I quote —

“I know the New South Wales Premier is unhappy, I know Mr Birmingham is unhappy. But frankly, bad luck,” he said.

“It might inconvenience the New South Wales Premier and some people from the eastern states, but frankly, I don't give a damn.”

That is the Premier of Western Australia. In another media comment, he says —

“I don't care if you don't like the food, I don't care if you don't like what's on TV.

“You're going to the hotel, you're staying there for two weeks, you're going to be in your room and you're not bringing the virus home.”

It is going to be popular out there, but are these really the words of a statesman, a Premier, who is doing what is right in the medium to long term for Western Australians? Not on your life.

He made a contemptible comment about the national Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Paul Kelly. ABC news online states —

Deputy Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly says he is ready to meet the WA Premier “any time”, after Mark McGowan said he did not know who he was amid an ongoing feud between state premiers over border closures.

Mr McGowan hit back at calls from the New South Wales and federal governments for interstate borders to be reopened, saying he would not be “bullied” by a state that allowed the Ruby Princess disaster to unfold.

“I don't know who Paul Kelly is, clearly not the singer,” he said.

I mean, really? Grow up—give me a break! In particular, an article titled “Double trouble?” states —

Mark McGowan says the number of Australians returning from overseas amounts to a Federal Government threat to fly people from COVID-19-riddled countries into Perth and “dump” them at the airport.

Dump them at the airport? Dump them at the airport? Then he wanted to put them on Christmas Island. I thought the left hated Christmas Island and detention centres. It is no good for asylum seekers but it is okay to dump returning Australians at the airport and then put them on Christmas Island. The Premier is better than this. We have been cooperative with the government on this matter, yet when we hear this sort of stuff, it is difficult. Lately, I have been trying to get answers from the government's offices. It was great for the first month, but in this past month I have got the hand again. With any comments I make or any questions I ask, I am getting the hand, particularly from the Premier. There is stuff about him not talking about the 28 days. That is nonsense. He said that he would not open the borders until there was no COVID transmission in the east for 28 days. On the 7.30 report on Wednesday, 16 September, he said —

What we've said, and this is the national approach, that if they get to no community spread in the east for twenty eight days well then obviously we can look towards the border being removed but until that point in time, the health advice that we currently have is that the border can't come down.

I asked him where that health advice was and he could not provide it. As I said, the opposition is asking legitimate questions. We are assisting the government in trying to keep the community calm. However, at the moment I do not see a plan. There is simply no plan for where we are going, other than to keep the borders shut. The government had better hope that our health system is in a good position to deal with it because sooner or later there will be

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another outbreak. Are we in a good position to deal with it? Let us consider this statement from a former shadow health minister —

“This is the first government in WA that has thrown up a white flag to the public to say our hospitals aren’t coping,” ... “What we have seen under the ... Government is an unprecedented spike in the number of ambulance ramping.

“Just on Thursday, there was 80 hours of ambulance ramping across Western Australia, over 40 hours at FSH alone.

“That’s a sign of how our hospitals aren’t coping.

They are not coping. The then shadow health minister, not me, made that statement. Let me tell members that it was not Zak Kirkup, but Hon Roger Cook, who said that. On 19 June 2016, the then shadow minister said that ambulance ramping was terrible and our health system was not coping. Members, let us have a little reality check. When the shadow minister made those comments in June 2016, there were 909 instances of ambulance ramping. Do members know how many there were in June 2020? There were 1 455. There was a sign that our hospitals were not coping in 2016, and there has been a 60 per cent increase in ambulance ramping since then, so you guys better hope there is not an outbreak because our hospitals are not ready to cope, according to the health minister. The Minister for Health has set that standard. Yes, I acknowledge the work that the government has done. “Fortress Western Australia” has worked, but the government has to think about where we are going with the plan to provide opportunities for small businesses, the tourism and hospitality sectors and, quite frankly, the goodwill of all Western Australians.

**HON AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan)** [10.50 am]: I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this motion. I am particularly interested in paragraph (f), which says that this house urges the McGowan government to —

respect Western Australians suffering isolation from their loved ones located throughout Australia and overseas.

That is probably the most important part of this motion today. What I have observed over the last seven months that we have been in this weird state of lockdown is the rise of two disturbing trends. One is idolatry; the second is a loss of our humanity. I will get the idolatry one out of the way first because that is the more serious one. I think we can all recognise what has been happening. There have been front-page articles praising the Premier, treating him as though he is a rock star or a celebrity; there have been pop songs; and there have been fawning Facebook pages—free media coverage as far as the eye can see. It should be disturbing because in a parliamentary democracy like ours, we do not want to elevate politicians. The Premier has a very serious constitutional role to fulfil. We do not want that role elevated to a religious icon status. It is not healthy for democracy; it is not healthy for Parliament. It is disappointing. It is disappointing as well to see it engaged in by people who are supposed republicans who find the idea of a monarchy repugnant, yet are willing to elevate the Premier, Mark McGowan, to that role.

A more concerning trend I have seen is this loss of humanity. I find it funny because those who advocate strict, harsh lockdowns, a hard border and a no-nonsense, no-compromise approach to our COVID response say they are doing this because they care about people—because they want to save lives. At the same time, they are treating their fellow humans like pawns—like pieces of garbage. They have no respect for their humanity, no respect for their agency and their autonomy, and no respect for their wants and desires; they merely treat them like pieces on a chessboard that can be moved around. If they are outside Western Australia, they are treated like aliens. They are treated like foreign citizens who have no rights. I find it rather remarkable.

We have heard a few examples from previous speakers, but I would like to remind members of a few things that stood out to me as being rather concerning. Earlier in September, an article appeared in *The Australian* and on ABC news and other media outlets, in which the Premier said, in response to the federal government wanting to increase the cap on the number of Australians returning to our shores, that he did not want the commonwealth “bossing people around”. He was talking about state and territory leaders. He basically said that the commonwealth was just trying to fly people in and dump them on our doorstep. He was referring to Western Australians and other Australian citizens—they are our fellow man; they are our neighbours; they are our family members; they are our brothers and sisters. They are the people who we should be looking out for, who we should be trying to protect. These are the people who we should be moving heaven and earth to bring back to Australia.

It is rather interesting, in fact, because the federal government has revealed that there are 26 000 Australians stranded overseas who want to return home. Of those, 3 500 are extremely vulnerable and need to return immediately. They include people who are in need of medical care—for example, pregnant women and cancer patients—and those

returning for compassionate reasons. But the Premier does not want them “dumped” on our doorstep, including people who need immediate medical care. The Premier is more concerned about them being dumped here, rather than ensuring that they get the care that they need.

So callous has the Premier’s response been, members will be aware that around the same time he made comments about wanting to send returning Australians to Christmas Island and to Australian Defence Force bases. That was pointed out by some journalists fairly quickly, including Lanai Scarr from *The West Australian*, with her headline “Predators currently detained on Christmas Island as Mark McGowan floats plan for returning Australians”. She pointed out that the detention centre on Christmas Island is used to house people who have broken the law and committed serious crimes, in most cases, and are being deported. It sometimes takes a long time for these people to be deported to their home countries. It includes people who have committed child sex offences and it includes rapists, violent offenders and violent gang members. Those people are housed on Christmas Island.

When I heard this announcement, I did some research into Christmas Island. I spoke to somebody who worked at the detention centre in a security role. This person told me about the kinds of characters who are housed in the detention centre on Christmas Island and the kind of violence that happens and cases in which security guards have lost control of the compound during riots when detainees armed themselves with various makeshift weapons. Is this really the kind of place we want vulnerable people housed? I am sure they would be in separate compounds; I believe there is an annexe that is a little further away from the main compound, but still, is this an ideal place for those who are vulnerable trying to return home to their families?

This person who worked on Christmas Island told me about the lack of medical care available on Christmas Island. If anybody had a serious medical condition, they would need to be flown off of Christmas Island and either back to Western Australia or, if it was really severe, to Indonesia. In fact, it is sometimes hard to get shipments into the island, if there is bad or rough weather, due to the rough seas out there. How is this a suitable place to be sending vulnerable Western Australians who are doing nothing more than trying to return home to their families? Quite often, Australians have been working overseas—as we heard was the case with Mr Stephen Spencer, the Western Australian war veteran who is stranded in the United Arab Emirates—but their work has fallen through due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now they are trying to return home to their families, sometimes with small children in tow. The Premier seems not to care about that. He would rather play tough. He does not want these people dumped on our doorstep. I think that is incredibly sad; it is a loss of our humanity.

We have seen it as well in the way that people in hotel quarantine have been treated. I have some serious objections to the idea of subjecting people to electronic monitoring. If it is done in a very targeted way, there may be a case for it, but when done broadly, it is dehumanising and humiliating. People who are doing nothing more than trying to reunite with their families are subjected to the same electronic monitoring that we subject high-risk sex offenders to. These people are not rapists or paedophiles; they are people who are trying to return home. We are subjecting them to this kind of humiliation.

The Premier does not care too much about these people either. When folks are locked in hotel rooms for two weeks, with no windows, no fresh air, no opportunity for exercise and no human contact, can members imagine what that does to them psychologically? Solitary confinement is used as a form of punishment in prisons and here we are subjecting people to it in hotel quarantine. I understand the conditions have improved since then, but back in April when the conditions were still quite bad and some of these concerns were raised with the Premier, he said —

“I don’t care if you don’t like the food, I don’t care if you don’t like what’s on TV.”

...

“We’re all having to make sacrifices in these tough times, staying in a hotel for a couple of weeks is a small price to pay.”

The Premier compared it with having an extended holiday. Again, no concern was given to the real needs of the people who are caught up in this process. I think the idolatry has gone to the Premier’s head. It has caused him to become callous and uncaring. Then we have, as I said, that loss of humanity—chasing an arbitrary public health goal without any regard to all the other things that go into what makes up our society, such as equality under the law and respect for our rights and liberties. Of course we need to have some restrictions during this time, but we should not do that at the expense of our humanity. We should treat people like decent human beings, with respect and dignity. I absolutely support the motion, in particular paragraph (f), which urges the McGowan government to respect Western Australians suffering isolation from their loved ones located throughout Australia and overseas. I say to the Premier that it is time to tear down this wall; it really is. I will not channel Reagan too much! Honestly, I understand the need for quarantine and to isolate people who arrive, but we need to put in place a plan to bring these people home. They are Western Australians, and Australian citizens, and we owe a duty to look after them and provide them

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with help. We should be doing everything we can to bring them home and make sure they are safe, rather than putting up a barrier to keep ourselves safe at the expense of vulnerable people who are overseas.

**HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan)** [11.01 am]: I rise because I am keen to speak to this motion on behalf of the Greens. Since the beginning of this pandemic, the Greens have been very clear that we support the public health advice, and we have been clear that we are particularly concerned to make sure that vulnerable Australians, and vulnerable Western Australians in particular, are able to be best protected from this virus. We know, of course, that that is people with disability as well as older people and people with a range of underlying health issues. That has been the starting point that the Greens have brought to how we believe we should best respond to this pandemic.

I note that we have been dealing with this for six months now and that things are shifting. One of the things that has shifted is that we seem to have gone from having a lot of transparency about what was happening and being regularly informed, to what we are dealing with now, which is that it is very unclear what exactly is motivating a lot of the government's decisions. We do not have the same level of bipartisan transparency that I believe we started off with early in the pandemic. That is what I want to focus on. Looking at the wording of this particularly measured motion, it is hard to see how anyone could realistically be opposed to it unless they are opposed to making sure that everybody gets exactly the same information so that we are all on the same page and we all understand what needs to get done in order to best respond to this pandemic.

Looking at the wording that is in front of us, it would seem that the only reason the government would object to this is if it feels that it does not want to be fully publicly accountable for its decisions. I think the community is at the point at which people are demanding answers. We are demanding answers because we still have far too many people trying to get back into Western Australia who are facing unfathomable hardship and trauma, and because even when they arrive here, their treatment is inconsistent. I have stood in this place three times already over the course of the last sitting and spoken about the experiences of my best friend and of other people whom I am aware of, as well as people who have contacted my office. I have spoken at length on my concerns about the cap and the way that the quarantine arrangement is being managed. There is no question at all that it could be done better. It is interesting that since there has been some quite adverse media publicity about this, the feedback I am getting is that the situation is marginally improving. But of course it is marginally improving, because there was always heaps of scope for it to improve; it never needed to be as harsh as it was in the first place.

Getting back to the motion in front of us now, it urges the McGowan government to justify why, and on what grounds, it has abandoned a COVID-19 suppression strategy in favour of an elimination strategy. That is a reasonable request. As has already been articulated, it is quite clear that an elimination strategy has been pursued. Along with Hon Martin Aldridge and Zak Kirkup, the member for Dawesville, I have had semi-regular phone meetings with the Chief Health Officer. One of the questions I asked early in the piece was whether the state had decided to pursue an elimination strategy rather than a suppression strategy, and even then I was unable to get a clear answer. This is important information for people to have. If that is the public health advice that is coming out, it needs to be shared widely and unequivocally. We all need to know whether that is the advice that is being pursued and what the rationale is for withholding that advice if that is what is happening. The motion urges the government to regularly publish official information, including the public health information underpinning all of the government's major COVID-19 decisions. Why on earth would anyone be opposed to that? If the government is absolutely convinced that it is doing the right thing, it should put the rationale for that out there so that everyone can be on the same page as the government. The only reason that the government would not want to do that is if it is not following the public health advice. I want to hear what the government's rationale is for not being transparent about these decisions by not ensuring that the entire community understands what is going on and is on the same page.

Paragraph (c) urges the McGowan government to permit key officials, including the Chief Health Officer and the police commissioner, to regularly brief the public on COVID-19 matters. I note the difference between what is happening here and what is happening in the other states. The media in the other states are able to ask questions directly of those people in a way that is not happening here. I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with the Chief Health Officer. Firstly, face to face would be good—apparently, we do not have any COVID in this state, so we can do that now; we are face to face here in this chamber—and without a whole range of minders, because I feel as though we are not able to have a full and frank discussion. The problem also is that the discussions are truncated. During the last one we had, I had many questions but was cut short. I was not even able to put the questions that I had, so I was unable to get the full range of answers. I would appreciate that level of transparency.

I want to know about the inconsistencies with quarantine exemptions that have been granted over the course of the pandemic. There is no clear rationale for why some people who come into the state have to go through the hotel quarantining arrangements while others are able to quarantine at home. There is much more that I could say about that and about what has been brought to my attention. I know of people who, even in the last week, have arrived from other states and have been granted permission to quarantine at home, which is great, but there has been no further follow-up at all. Police have not gone to their homes. Those people have had ample opportunity to breach the

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arrangements if they wanted to. I happen to know they have not, because they are my friends and they are committed to this, but they are telling me about their experience. It is completely inconsistent because other families who have come from places in which there have not been COVID outbreaks have been put into tiny rooms without any windows for 14 days and are expected to pay for the privilege. The quarantining arrangements that are being applied are completely inconsistent.

The motion urges the McGowan government to table its plan for, and advise its preparedness to manage, a potential second-wave outbreak. Why on earth would the government not want to do that? Surely, if the work has been done, the government would want to make sure that everyone can be confident that the work has been done. If there are gaps in those plans, we need to address them and ensure that we are prepared for what everyone seems to deem is an inevitable second wave. The only reason the government would oppose that part of the motion is if the work has not been done or something else is going on. Just table it. I have been led to believe that a range of plans have been developed for a range of circumstances, and I am pleased to hear that, so table them and make them publicly available. Let other people assess them. I want our public health professionals to examine the plans and I want to hear their advice on whether they feel the plans are sufficient. If they are sufficient, well done—we will know that we are ready—but make it transparent and let everyone have that information.

Paragraph (f) of the motion urges the government to respect Western Australians suffering isolation from their loved ones located throughout Australia and overseas. Why would the government not support that? Is it because it ultimately thinks that our fellow citizens who are trapped and who cannot get back should not be respected? Is that why the government would oppose this provision? I, too, was disgusted by the language such as “dumping ground” being used to describe our fellow citizens trying to get back home. These people are not rubbish. These families are not rubbish. They are our citizens. They are our constituents, and they want to get home. We need to ensure that people can come back home in a way that is both compassionate and expedited. I believe we can do that in a way that is respectful of the public health advice, but that can be done only if the government has the political will to make sure that that occurs. I have not been convinced to date that that is really the case. The Greens will support this motion because I cannot see the argument for why we would not. If the government is saying that fellow Western Australians are rubbish, it does not want to be transparent, it is not actually prepared, and it is making decisions contrary to the public health advice, I could see why the government will oppose this motion. I could understand that; it would make perfect sense to me. Otherwise, we have all been in this together. This chamber has bent over backwards to assist with legislation. We have been trying to make sure we are keeping together as a community. But transparency is an absolute key part of that and that is what this motion is calling for.

**HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary)** [11.10 am]: I rise to provide a response on behalf of the government. “A crisis now largely confected” were the words of the honourable member, the mover of the motion. I have to say that I was quite surprised by those words. Let me provide the chamber with a bit of context and the honourable member with some background that might assist him to understand that this crisis is nowhere near confected. However, I understand his words in a way because in WA, it is quite easy to lose sight of the fact that there is a COVID-19 outbreak around the world—because our borders have made us safe and because our systems are working. I therefore understand that it is pretty simple for the honourable member to think that the crisis might be largely confected. However, of course it is not. The reality is that there is still a global COVID-19 pandemic. It has not slowed down, not for a second, not for one single person. In fact, this week a new, sad, record has been set for the number of cases around the world of people with COVID-19—a new record. Members might have heard that countries like the United Kingdom, and, indeed, a lot of Europe, are in the midst of a second wave of outbreaks. In fact, the UK, where many of our friends and relatives live, has had to re-impose significant restrictions and it looks as though they will last around six months. To me, that is not a crisis that is largely confected. That is a real and present crisis. In the USA, there have been more than 200 000 deaths from COVID-19. Around the world, almost a million people have died. That is a crisis. The number of cases diagnosed daily around the world is around 300 000, and that is only the number of people who can access testing. That is a crisis. It is alarming but it is what happens when restrictions are lifted before the virus is under control. Here in WA, the number of recorded cases is very low and limited to returned travellers. We are seeing a steady stream of positive tests returned, but, as I said, thankfully our hotel quarantine is effective, which is another reason we have to keep it running well.

Last week, through the Premier, the state government reached an agreement with the federal government to increase the cap on the number of international arrivals into Western Australia. From the statistics we are seeing on people overseas, it is very important that we bring fellow Western Australians home in a sensible and safe manner and that we do not stretch our system to create problems for us in the future.

It is not that the government is without compassion. Members of this chamber do not have a monopoly on compassion. This government has great insight into the difficulties that people are experiencing in trying to return to Western Australia. I have two brothers and a niece currently living overseas, so I understand the difficulties, the



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problems and the worries people have—flights cancelled and access to quarantine. This government understands the situation and is doing everything it possibly can to actively support Western Australians trying to return home.

The motion refers to the supposed abandonment of a suppression strategy. Again, let me give members some context about the strategy. The government has not abandoned that strategy; it is a nationally agreed strategy. It was first agreed by the commonwealth and all the states way back on 16 March. That strategy is still in place and, in fact, all the states and the commonwealth recommitted to the suppression strategy on 24 July and added an additional goal—this is the important bit and maybe where honourable members are getting confused—of no local community transmission. The government has not abandoned the suppression strategy; it has recommitted to the suppression strategy.

The honourable member talked also at length about publishing official information, and about access to the Chief Health Officer. This government has provided unprecedented access to information and to the Chief Health Officer. The Premier, the Minister for Health, the Commissioner of Police and the Chief Health Officer have all provided information through the media and through other mediums. There are two public access websites in fact—[healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/coronavirus), and the health department's website—and most people have access to those sites. The government has provided a coronavirus information line and a further website around public health directions. All the information on the decisions that the government has had to make in this crisis are available on the government website. That is unprecedented access to information.

The Chief Health Officer himself regularly responds to requests for comments from journalists for print, radio and TV in a way that reaches the WA community. In addition, the Chief Health Officer has his own Twitter page on which he regularly publishes public health information. I agree that that is unusual, but it is a public medium that the community uses. He is a trusted public health official. He has also made several videos that have been published and are available and he is willing to conduct additional interviews and, in fact, to brief the public directly on public health advice. He has also offered to provide—that offer is still open—several briefings to members of Parliament and to health spokespeople in Parliament. Some members of Parliament have also had access to and regular contact with the Minister for Health's office. They pick up the phone and talk to the minister's office and know they are getting the information they want. It may not be the information they like but it is the information they want.

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Every other person who had a chance to speak was heard pretty much in silence. Please apply the same level of courtesy to the parliamentary secretary. Also, I remind you that Hansard are not on the floor; they are above us and they are sometimes finding it very difficult to hear speakers, so, by being quiet, it assists them to do their job. Thank you.

**Hon ALANNA CLOHESY:** Thank you, Madam President.

Let me talk about the approvals process, because there has been some criticism of it. I remind members that the approvals process is there to ensure that there is no community spread of COVID-19 and WA stays safe. The approvals process has, of course, evolved over time. Back in March there was nothing. There was no approvals process system and no intrastate, interstate or international border controls. Think about how far we have come to ensure that our community remains safe. Remember what it felt like. Think about what our family and friends are going through in Victoria. We have these controls to avoid those situations.

The G2G PASS is the process that people use to apply to come into Western Australia. It has evolved over time into a process that is as efficient as it can possibly be. This process restricts entry and directs quarantine as necessary. This approvals process has been heavily supported by industry, the community and unions to keep our critical infrastructure working and our economy moving and growing. Compassionate applications are received by the WA Police Force and are assessed individually on their merits and by looking at the supporting evidence that is provided. The police look at every single application. Sometimes there might be multiple applications by the one person. It is not an easy system to manage, but it is growing and working as efficiently as possible.

Thousands of people who want to travel to WA have made applications—literally thousands—and there are a lot of reasons for that travel. Many people have been rejected and feel aggrieved. We understand that. Applications are rejected not because the police are not compassionate and caring, but because of the requirements set out in the directives that have been made, which are available on the government website. I have told the honourable member and this chamber a number of times that the reason for having all the directives in one place is so that people can see them and understand them.

As I said, many people have made multiple applications and some of that information conflicts with the original application. Therefore, there is a triage system. The applications come in and are considered by the person making the decision. The police are open to a review of the decision, but the police cannot talk about individual applications because that is a matter between the person making the application and the police. Sometimes statements made to

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the media by applicants are not always the same as the context provided in the application. It is important that each of those applications is looked at. When an appeal is required or asked for, it is considered by someone further up the chain of command. Members should keep in mind the volume of applications coming through as well.

The WA Police Force has updated the G2G PASS system and it is now the envy of the other states, which are looking to implement the application process and system that has been instituted and developed by Western Australia. Western Australians should be proud of that because Western Australia is actually leading the way.

I could contribute much more to the debate because some of the information that has been passed off as fact by members opposite in this chamber is not fact. It is conjecture; it is myth. I might even suggest that it is a little bit of a “don’t let the facts or the evidence get in the way of a good conspiracy”. I can tell those members that there is nothing like a good old political stoush in the midst of a crisis, is there? That is a confected approach to trying to deal with this crisis.

This government has reviewed, and is continuing to review, every single system and strategy that is in place. Should there be a COVID-19 outbreak, the plans that are in place have been developed with industry and various sectors to deal with it. I spoke at length even yesterday about the details of those plans, particularly in the aged-care sector.

**HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.25 am]:** I will make some comments on this non-government business motion, and I thank Hon Tjorn Sibma for bringing it to the house.

The important thing to remember here is that one of the problems we face is the lack of information, clarification, transparency and accountability. This government does not want to work with the rest of Parliament. It does not matter which house; it does not want to work with Parliament to go through all the aspects of a very difficult pandemic. Everyone who has been around for a while understands that when people have all the information and knowledge and are not prepared to share that information and knowledge, it gives them a certain amount of power, and I think this government gets off on that. Unfortunately, a lot of the public does not understand that. It does not sit in one of these two houses. But 60 per cent of the people in Western Australia chose different parties and different people to represent them in this house, and that information is not being shared with those people. Other than the government, there are six different parties. The Leader of the Greens agrees with this motion because transparency and accountability are important to us. I sit on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, and I chose to sit on it because those two areas—transparency and accountability—are important to me and my party. We have a job to do, regardless of who is in government. We have to hold government officials, the Premier and everyone else in the government, accountable.

However, they believe that they can handle this pandemic on their own and they do not want to discuss the issues or share the information with the rest of Parliament. The lack of respect that the Premier shows towards this house does not surprise me. Members have talked about that, so I will not bring up those issues again. The government has been very clear about the constitutional matters and other areas that have been brought up in this house over the last 18 months. We are looking for justification for the government’s decisions. We want that transparency and accountability.

I looked at this motion and I read through the paragraphs. I find it very hard to disagree with any of them. From looking at quarantine exemptions, there seems to be the favoured few. The government cannot deny that. It can cover up all it likes, but it cannot deny that. We are asking for the plans to be tabled. Western Australians want to know and have some idea about what the future holds. Government members are keeping that very close to their chest because, as I said before, information is power and the government wants that power; it wants to wield that power over the people of Western Australia.

The motion also refers to respect for Western Australians suffering isolation from loved ones located throughout Australia and overseas. We have seen many reports about that. It does not matter whether people listen to the ABC or read the Murdoch press. We are even now starting to see some more balanced journalism in *The West Australian*. It is just starting to come out. People are starting to think that maybe there has been some unfair treatment going on when it comes to exemptions.

I was not going to speak on this motion, but how can members not support it? How can they not care about the people of Western Australia? They want information and we need information because we represent those people. Sixty per cent of Western Australians send representatives to this house. They want the information and we represent them. This is a good motion and I hope that the whole of this house, other than the government, supports it.

**Hon Pierre Yang:** Mr Acting President!

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas):** Are you asking for a point of order, Hon Pierre Yang?

**Hon Pierre Yang:** I am asking for the call.

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**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** I do not have a list of who has spoken to date or how many opposition members have spoken.

**Hon Pierre Yang:** The mover and the Leader of the Opposition spoke. Apart from the parliamentary secretary, no-one from the government has spoken.

**Hon Alanna Clohesy:** And the Leader of the Greens and One Nation.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT:** In the seven minutes remaining, I apologise and ask Hon Pierre Yang whether he does not mind sharing the time with Hon Michael Mischin. I will give Hon Pierre Yang the first go.

**HON PIERRE YANG (South Metropolitan) [11.31 am]:** It would be my pleasure to share the time with Hon Michael Mischin. I have to say that I am thoroughly disappointed by the motion and the attitude the mover of the motion displayed in his remarks. If anyone is politicising this issue, it is the opposition. It is just not on! I will go through some points. Because of the government's splendid management of this world crisis, WA is the only state that has increased its economic activity. We had 1.1 per cent growth over the 12 months of 2019–20, but the rest of the nation has fallen into economic recession for the first time in 30 years. Let us not forget about that.

The honourable member who moved the motion also estimated that over the last six months or so, if I am not misquoting him, there have been 40 000 movements of people into the state. That is not to say that the border is shut completely. We need essential services and to let Western Australians come back home.

I want to make sure that people are aware of the context of the Premier's words. I heard accusations that the word "dumping" was used. I will go back to that point. It is said that it somehow showed a lack of compassion. Let me tell members what was specifically said. Hon Mark McGowan was responding to what the commonwealth was trying to do. He said —

Bossing people around, basically saying they are just going to fly people in and dump them on our doorstep ...

The Premier was not showing any disrespect to Western Australians. It was a direct response to the irresponsible and uncooperative approach demonstrated by the commonwealth Liberal government. The Premier had not even been briefed or provided with any forewarning that the plan was to increase arrivals in Western Australia by 500 people before it went public. The commonwealth Liberal government went public first. The Premier only found out from the media. Is that the way the commonwealth government wants to do things in this commonwealth? We have a federal system in which the commonwealth government has certain authorities, including quarantine, and the state government has certain authorities. We are a sovereign state; let us not forget that. It is very important to ask the commonwealth what it will do for Western Australia. Will it pay all these fees? In my remaining 30 seconds, I want to say that Hon Tjorn Sibma may have some authority on border issues because he mentioned that he was an adviser to the Howard government. We certainly would not be taking any advice from the New South Wales Premier, Gladys Berejiklian.

**HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [11.35 am]:** I am glad that Hon Pierre Yang and Hon Alanna Clohesy raised those arguments because, in the limited time available to me, I will address the last part of Hon Tjorn Sibma's motion, although much can be said about the other bits.

All this talk about information being available is a nonsense. The situation has been politicised all the way down the line by the government for its own advantage. Last Wednesday, I asked a number of simple questions about borders. I asked whether the Premier considers that he and his government have a responsibility to care for Western Australians; and, if so, why is the government not paying for any hotel isolation required of Western Australians returning to their home state, rather than imposing the financial burden and hardship on them, given the alleged forthcoming budget surplus? Do members know what the answer was? It was —

The state government is still waiting on a response from the Prime Minister with respect to mobilising additional Australian Defence Force assets to Western Australia commensurate with what has been provided to other states.

What does that have to do with it?

**Hon Sue Ellery** interjected.

**Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN:** I am glad Hon Sue Ellery asked that question; she proffered that nonsense on behalf of her Premier! I tried to get a clarification of that the following day and asked —

What does mobilising the Australian Defence Force have to do with my question ... about Western Australians paying for hotel isolation?

The response was —

It is entirely reasonable that people returning to Australia pay their own quarantine expenses.

**Extract from *Hansard***

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 24 September 2020]

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There was no explanation. These are Western Australians, not Australians. These are not the people from New South Wales who the Premier told some time ago, “If you’re thinking of coming to WA, don’t bother. We don’t want you!” These are not the people he thinks are being dumped on us. These are people who are trying to return to their homes. It is an outrage that if someone wants to come home at this time of crisis, the Premier says no. He is happy to take their taxes, but he is going to close the border to them. He says that if they want to come home, they have to pay for it, unless, of course, they are Kerry Stokes, in which case they can do their time at home and not have to worry about it. Anyone else who comes home has to pay for their hotel accommodation and the rubbish meals that they may be served up, and be treated like a prisoner.

It is an outrage that that is the attitude of this government, as is its refusal to provide straightforward answers to simple questions rather than handballing the responsibility to the commonwealth and showing no regard for its own citizens. If Western Australians want to come home, they should be looked after by their government, and not have the cost palmed off onto them. If government is meant to do one thing, it is to look after its citizens, whether they are well or ill and under any circumstances. The government must treat people evenly and equitably. That is the problem that another element of Hon Tjorn Sibma’s motion about consistency refers to. The Premier will not talk about individual cases and there is no transparency about how they are dealt with. There is no apparent consistency and there is the risk that people are being dealt with arbitrarily.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.