

CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Statement

HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [5.22 pm]: The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our way of life for at least the next six months. Certain groups of our society suffer more than others, namely the elderly and the disabled, and certain businesses suffer more than others, namely cafes, restaurants and hotels. Everyone is working very hard to survive this pandemic and many businesses and the public are sacrificing their normal lifestyles to meet the new emergency rules and strategies laid down by the government and, happily, it looks as though they are working.

The Labor government has always bragged about its achievement in getting the state's finances back in surplus. So far, I have not seen any of the surplus being used to ease the burden on the general public. If ever there was a time to spend money on the welfare of the general public, now is the time. Landlords are being asked to forgo rent, or at least lower the rent. Many of these people rely on that income to buy food and pay their utility bills.

I would like to read out two brief emails from two constituents. The first one is a letter received from a large travel agency. It states —

With the timeframe for recovery unclear at this point in time ... is now writing to all our landlords to request **immediate relief** for all our brands across our entire portfolio, including franchisees. Our priority is to get through this crisis a stronger and more successful organisation and to achieve this we need your urgent assistance with:

- At least 18 months' gross rent free (i.e. abatement of all base rent, outgoings and promotional contributions under our lease agreements);
- Flexible trading hours for at least 18 months, if any mandatory hours apply to the premises; and
- Freeze on rent escalations for at least 18 months.

In order to offset the above, we may be willing to discuss renewals, extensions or other metrics that would hold value for your operation.

The second email is from a constituent who has a large retailer as a tenant. It states —

Effective 1 April 2020 ... will move to paying rent monthly in arrears, with the gross rent to be reset at 10% of net sales for stores where sales exceed \$400,000 pa on a pro rata basis. For stores generating sales below \$400,000 pa we will require full rent relief. This framework is being applied across the entirety of our Australian and New Zealand retail store network. This framework will allow ... to reduce cash operating losses to more manageable levels and to reopen ... our much loved stores will clearly benefit landlords by generating traffic to centres and strips. Re-setting rent as a percentage of net sales will allow landlords to continue to receive some rental income during the recovery phase. We would like this arrangement to be in the form of an abatement over the next 6 months from April to September.

That boils down to absolute bullying.

I am concerned that the government is hell-bent on preserving its surplus no matter what. Most financial aid has come from Canberra, such as the JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments. We could cancel utility bills such as water, electricity and gas. This would assist all Western Australians. We could have free travel on Transperth buses. Land tax is another relief we could offer. Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria have offered their people more than \$400 million relief. Further east, the ministers in New Zealand's Ardern government have voluntarily accepted a 20 per cent reduction in their pay. My question without notice today asked whether our ministers would consider giving themselves a similar pay cut. The answer was basically no, but the government will monitor the situation. Along with my Pauline Hanson's One Nation colleague, I would be prepared to take a pay cut, and I call on all my parliamentary colleagues to agree to the same. Thousands of Western Australians are taking a hit or have lost their jobs. Why should we, as leaders in society, not lead by example? If WA polities whinge that we cannot afford a 20 per cent pay cut for the next six months, I say, "Deal with it, just like the rest of society has to deal with it."