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FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency General the Hon. David John Hurley, AC, DSC, FTSE (Retd)

House of Representatives Office Holders
Speaker—Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith MP
Deputy Speaker—Mr Llewellyn Stephen O'Brien MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Sharon Leah Bird MP, Ms Sharon Catherine Claydon MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Hon. Dr David Arthur Gillespie MP, Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Hon. Dr John Joseph McVeigh MP, Ms Maria Vanvakinou MP, Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP, Mr Andrew Bruce Wallace MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP, Mr Richard James Wilson MP, Mr Trent Moir Zimmerman MP
Leader of the House—Hon. Christian Porter MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Darren Chester MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Anthony Stephen Burke MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Mark Butler MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Scott John Morrison MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Joshua Anthony Frydenberg MP
Chief Government Whip—Mr Albertus Johannes van Manen MP
Government Whips—Mr Rowan Eric Ramsey MP and Ms Nicolle Flint MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Michael Francis McCormack MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. David Littleproud MP
Chief Whip—Hon Damian Kevin Drum MP
Deputy Whip—Mr Kenneth Desmond O'Dowd MP

Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Richard Marles MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP
Opposition Whips—Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP and Ms Anne Maree Stanley MP

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## Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
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<td>Wilson, Mr Timothy Robert</td>
<td>Goldstein, VIC</td>
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<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Hon. Kenneth George, AM</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young, Mr Terry James</td>
<td>Longman, QLD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
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<th>Party</th>
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<tr>
<td>Zimmerman, Mr Trent Moir</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
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</tbody>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party; CA—Centre Alliance; IND—Independent; KAP—Katter’s Australia Party; LNP—Liberal National Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals;

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments

- Clerk of the Senate—R Pye
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—C Surtees
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—R Stefanić
- Parliamentary Budget Officer—J Wilkinson
# Morrison Ministry

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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td>The Hon Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon Ben Morton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon Michael McCormack MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management</td>
<td>The Hon David Littleproud MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts</td>
<td>The Hon Paul Fletcher MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Coulton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education</td>
<td>The Hon Andrew Gee MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Road Safety and Freight Transport</td>
<td>The Hon Scott Buchholz MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon Kevin Hogan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories</td>
<td>The Hon Nola Marino MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Michael Sukkar MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing</td>
<td>The Hon Michael Sukkar MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jane Hume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Finance, Charities and Electoral Matters</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Zed Seselja</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management</td>
<td>The Hon David Littleproud MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Environment</td>
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<td>Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia</td>
<td>The Hon Keith Pitt MP</td>
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<td>Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management</td>
<td>The Hon Trevor Evans MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jonathon Duniam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Simon</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Birmingham</td>
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<td>The Hon. Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</strong></td>
<td>Senator Jenny McAllister</td>
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<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Richard Marles MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Defence</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Shayne Neumann MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel</td>
<td>Mr Pat Conroy MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Industry</td>
<td>Mr Matt Keogh MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Penny Wong</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Mr Pat Conroy MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister to the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Jenny McAllister</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Kristina Keneally</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship</strong></td>
<td>Mr Andrew Giles MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business in the House of Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Government Services</strong></td>
<td>Ms Emma McBride MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Carers</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Education and Training</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Education and Training</td>
<td>Mr Graham Perrett MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Skills</td>
<td>Ms Ged Kearney MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>Mr Stephen Jones MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Treasury</td>
<td>The Hon. Dr Andrew Leigh MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Charities</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon. Catherine King MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Tasmania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Northern Australia</td>
<td>The Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Road Safety</td>
<td>Senator Glenn Sterle</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Constitutional Reform</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for the Republic</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Communications</td>
<td>Ms Michelle Rowland MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Cyber Security</td>
<td>Mr Tim Watts MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate</td>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Government Accountability</td>
<td>Senator Kimberley Kitching</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services</strong></td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Reconciliation</td>
<td>Senator Patrick Dodson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for Manufacturing</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>The Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Environment and Water</td>
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<td>Shadow Assistant Minister for the Environment</td>
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<tr>
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The SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Smith) took the chair at 10:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER
Parliamentary Arrangements

The SPEAKER (10:01): I wish to draw the attention of honourable members to the special arrangements for the operation of the chamber. The most obvious is the changed sitting arrangements, which you will have already noticed. The increased spacing in the chamber means that members won’t be sitting in their normal seats. Please sit only in the seat or the space allocated to you with your name. These allocations have been arranged so that you are sufficiently far apart.

You will also note additional seats placed outside the benches. These seats are reserved for members and are considered to be within the area of members' seats for the purposes of any divisions that may be called. Ministers and shadow ministers on the front bench may come to the dispatch box to speak. Other ministers and shadow ministers in the rows behind frontbenchers are asked to remain at their allocated temporary seats to speak. During divisions, the tellers will operate from the Hansard table.

There will also be reduced services from attendants. Water will not be provided by attendants but is available in the bottles at the rear of the chamber. Members can obtain their own water and are requested to dispose of the empty bottles in one of the bins. Members will also be allowed to bring their own water into the chamber. The attendants will only take documents to and from members of the frontbench, in order to minimise closer contact and the handling of papers.

There are bottles of hand sanitizer at a number of locations within and around the chamber. You will also note that several of the doors to the chamber are open. This is to reduce the need for members to touch the door handles. The doors, however, will be closed during divisions. The handles will also be regularly cleaned during the day.

I’m very conscious of the need to limit the total number of people in the chamber at any one time. For this reason, occupants of the advisers boxes will be required to leave during divisions. When divisions are called, the attendants will hold the doors open but will then remain outside the chamber when the doors are locked. The press gallery is restricted to a maximum of only four photographers plus Auspic at any one time, with one registered photographer allowed to remain during the division. The press gallery is closed to all other media representatives. However, the media may, at any time through the course of the sitting, use the second-floor enclosed galleries that are normally reserved for school visits.

I thank members for their cooperation and forbearance during this difficult and extraordinary time.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (10:04): I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his assistance in settling the terms of this suspension of standing orders. I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the following from occurring in relation to business for today:

(1) the Prime Minister to make a ministerial statement, with the Leader of the Opposition to respond;
(2) the Federation Chamber not to meet today;
(3) the business for this sitting to be restricted to bills relating to the Coronavirus Economic Response Package, Supply bills, Question Time, and any other business agreed between a Minister and the Manager of Opposition Business;
(4) presentation and consideration of bills relating to the Coronavirus Economic Response Package to be given priority over all other business until 2 pm;
(5) the provisions of standing order 133 not to apply;
(6) a Minister to present the bills together and the first reading of each bill to be given;
(7) the minister to move one motion that the bills be read a second time, and make a second reading speech;
(8) at the conclusion of the second reading speech, a cognate debate to ensue;
(9) if consideration of the bills and any other business has not concluded by 2 pm, the debate to be interrupted for Question Time;

CHAMBER
(10) if consideration of the bills and any other business concludes before 2 pm, the House then to suspend until 2 pm;

(11) immediately following Question Time, business to resume, if required;

(12) when the debate concludes, a Minister to be called to sum up the debate, then without delay the immediate question, or questions, necessary to complete the second reading of the bills to be put;

(13) if the second reading of the bills is agreed to and any Messages from the Governor-General announced, the bills then to be taken as a whole during consideration in detail, if required, for no longer than sixty minutes, with any Government amendments to the bills that have been circulated to be treated as if they have been moved together, any Opposition amendments which have been circulated to be treated as if they had been moved together, and any amendments circulated by non-aligned Members which have been circulated to be treated as if they had been moved together, with:

(a) one question to be put on all the Government amendments;

(b) one question then to be put on any amendments which have been circulated by Opposition Members;

(c) single questions then to be put on any amendments circulated by each non-aligned Member; and

(d) any further questions necessary to complete the remaining stages of the bills to be put without delay;

(14) if consideration in detail is not required, the question on the third reading of the bills to be put immediately after the second readings of the bills and the announcement of any Messages from the Governor-General;

(15) if at 5 pm the second reading debate is still in progress, the debate to be interrupted and all questions necessary to complete consideration of the bills to be put immediately, including the questions on any amendments circulated, as detailed in paragraph 13, above;

(16) following the third reading of the bills, a Minister to introduce three supply bills together and the first reading of each bill to be given, the Minister to move one motion that the bills be read a second time and make a second reading speech;

(17) at the conclusion of the second reading speech a cognate debate to ensue until no later than 7.30 pm, with the immediate question, or questions, necessary to complete the second reading of the bills then to be put and one question on the third reading of the bills then to be put;

(18) other business, if agreed by a Minister and the Manager of Opposition Business, then to ensue;

(19) at the conclusion of any other business, or after Question Time if all business has been disposed of, the Speaker then to suspend the House until the ringing of the bells;

(20) when the sitting resumes any further business relating to the bills or other business agreed by a Minister and the Manager of Opposition Business to ensue and the Speaker then to adjourn the House until a later date and hour to be fixed by the Speaker; and

(21) any variation to this arrangement to be made only by a motion moved by a Minister with leave granted by the Manager of Opposition Business.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (10:09): I want to thank the Leader of the House for the productive conversations that have led to this. Today is only possible because of cooperation. In acknowledging our support of the suspension motion that's been put forward, I should also acknowledge the cooperation of those who are not here. There are a large number of members of parliament who want to be here today and are not because they understand the circumstances that we're in and the importance of the different distancing measures that are in place. I also want to acknowledge the cooperation from you, Mr Speaker. To save time, I will raise something now and perhaps after we've dealt with the suspension you could deal with it. There has been some question as to whether today people who are not sitting on the front bench should speak from their allocated place—as in the new allocation—or whether they should speak from the ordinary seating plan. If you could clarify that at the end, that would be appreciated.

The SPEAKER: We might deal with the motion first. The question is that the motion moved by the Leader of the House be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER
Parliamentary Arrangements

The SPEAKER (10:10): I thank the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business for all of their work over the last couple of days. With respect to the seating for social distancing, there's a new seating plan. Members should speak from where they are. Broadcasting has that plan. Just to be very clear: for frontbenchers who are not in their usual seat, if they're in the second or the third row, they should not come to the dispatch box. Only those frontbenchers sitting on the front bench should come to the dispatch box. The additional seats I mentioned that are at the back there—they're normally in the distinguished visitors gallery—are there, really, for the purpose of divisions and in the event that there need to be additional seats and we still maintain that distancing requirement. I hope that clarifies it. If anyone's got any further queries through the course of this morning, please come and ask me.
MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

COVID-19

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (10:12): We gather today at a time of great challenge for our nation and, indeed, the world. We are a strong nation and a strong people, but in the months ahead this will put us all to the test, as at no time like this since the Second World War. But together, Australia, we are up to this challenge.

The coronavirus that is sweeping the world will continue to change the way we live, but we must not allow it to change who we are as Australians. I know—we all know—that Australians are very concerned at this difficult time. It is the understandable fear of the unknown, and there is much that is not known about the coronavirus, but we must not let that fear overtake us. We must focus instead on what we do know, what we can control.

We know who we are as a people and the legacy and inspiration that has been given to us from those who have come before us and shown us the way through challenges and tests just like this. So we summon the spirit of the Anzacs, of our Great Depression generation, of those who built the Snowy, of those who won the great peace of the Second World War and defended Australia. That is our legacy that we draw on at this time.

We also know the actions that we can take—the care, compassion and respect we must show from one to another. Whilst some must self-isolate—and they must—and we all must keep a healthy social distance between us, it is important that we do all we can to ensure in the difficult months ahead that no Australian goes through this alone. The responsibility we know we must take for our own actions and our own behaviours—the tests, hardships and sacrifices that will be placed on all of us, on our national character—will undoubtedly break our hearts on many occasions in the months ahead. But we must resolve today as Australians to come together and to pledge to each other across our nation that this coronavirus will not break our Australian spirit.

So, together, and with the rest of the world, we face this unprecedented challenge, a once-in-100-years event, a global health pandemic that has fast become an economic crisis the likes of which we have not seen since the Great Depression. Life is changing in Australia for every Australian. Life is going to continue to change. For many—young and old—2020 will be the toughest year of our lives. Meeting this challenge is bigger than any Australian. It's obviously bigger than politics. It's bigger than any of us who are in this chamber. Prime ministers, leaders of the opposition, ministers, shadow ministers and members of parliament—it is bigger than all of us. It is bigger than premiers, chief ministers, captains of industry, leaders of union movements. It is bigger than all of us. I want to thank all of those who have come to this great challenge with such a unity of spirit. It requires every single Australian to do their duty as public citizens.

Again, in that spirit, I want to thank, in particular, the nation's premiers and chief ministers for coming together to form Australia's first ever national cabinet, a cabinet of all Australian governments: five Labor leaders, four coalition leaders. I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the cooperation he and his colleagues have afforded us here in this parliament as we battle this dual health and economic crisis. Today, we have some very important work to do to cushion the blow on Australians from the economic whirlwind that is being reaped by this coronavirus. In the months ahead, we will face more issues that none of us even now can imagine. Our job as the Australian government is to work night and day to ensure our great country, our beloved Australia, gets to the other side and emerges stronger, safer and united.

It is our advice that Australians will be living with this virus for at least the next six months. It could be longer. There is no three- or four-week shutdown that makes it all go away. There is no short-term solution to this. We have to steel ourselves for the next six months and work together to slow the spread in order to save lives, to protect the elderly and vulnerable Australians, because they are counting on us. Every extra bit of time we save allows us to better prepare for the challenges that are ahead.

Last night, all the states and territories, through the national cabinet, agreed to an even more stringent set of social distancing rules that will change further how we all live our lives. There will be no more going to the pub after work. There will be no more going to the gym in the morning. There will be no more sitting down for brunch at a cafe. These changes are vital to slow the spread of this virus to save lives.

As the virus spreads, and it will, governments around Australia will not be complacent and may need, and are likely to need, to impose further restrictions on our daily lives. Wherever possible, we will seek to do that to ensure a consistency of approach between all states and territories. It will be absolutely vital that every Australian respects and follows the healthy social distancing measures that all Australian governments have implemented in order to flatten this curve and to save lives. Limits on outdoor and indoor mass gatherings, keeping non-essential indoor gatherings to less than one person per four square metres—wherever possible, keeping 1½ metres between yourself and others—avoiding all non-essential travel and even simply following good hygiene is essential to slowing this virus. Washing your hands thoroughly, coughing and sneezing into your elbow, not touching your
face are all practical measures that we can all observe to save lives. I will say this: while you may not be able to go to church, the synagogue, the temple or the mosque, I most certainly call on all people of faith in our nation to pray. I can assure you, my prayer is getting a good work out.

As Australia works to flatten the curve and slow this virus, we also face an immense economic challenge. Across Australia today, many thousands of Australians will lose their jobs. They are lining up at Centrelink offices as we speak—something unimaginable at this scale only weeks ago. Many have lost their jobs, and we know many more will. This is the biggest economic shock our nation has faced in generations. Australia, a long and open trading nation, is now closed off, largely, from the world. Internal border restrictions not seen since before Federation are now in place.

Yesterday, the Treasurer and I announced an economic support package, a safety net package, unprecedented in our nation's history in its scale and coverage. Measures announced to date total some, together with the Reserve Bank, $189 billion in economic support, around 10 per cent of the size of our economy. The measures we have announced are focusing on those who are on the frontline, those who will be feeling the first blows of the economic impact of the coronavirus as it wreaks its havoc. So we'll supercharge our safety net—doubling, effectively, the jobseeker payment and allowing Australians to draw on those resources they have put aside for such a time as this—to support the most vulnerable with additional payments to pensioners and carers and the disabled, to provide a lifeline to small and medium-sized businesses. We will be working together with the banks—and I thank them also—to keep those businesses afloat wherever possible, to keep as many employees as they can, but with the pledge in our support to them that when we pass this virus, those businesses that have had to stand people down will stand them back up again on the other side. This will give them that assurance, give them that encouragement, as they have to stand staff down, commit to do all they can on the other side to stand them back up again. This is the unwritten contract that is being undertaken between Australian employees and employers as we speak, to provide also a legal shield to protect both businesses from closures and individuals, to preserve our economy and to boost our recovery on the other side.

To those who have lost their jobs already and will, to those whose incomes are collapsing, to those who are barely holding their businesses together or who have already seen their dream taken from them by this virus, this is devastating and this is heartbreaking. And we will do all we can in this place as a parliament and all we can as a government to help see you through. We will be doing everything we can to protect those most vulnerable to the impacts of this crisis and to preserve the businesses that employ them. There will be more support to come, and it will keep coming for as long as this challenge is before this nation. Even more importantly, when this passes, we will be there to ensure that Australians get back on their feet, that the businesses rebuild, that our economy resurges and that we go on in the great national story of this amazing nation, Australia.

In conclusion, the more Australians work together, the more we share the sacrifice and the burden, the more we do the right thing, the more lives and the more livelihoods we will save. And when the virus passes—and it will—we will be stronger on the other side. This will be a test of all Australians. It is a test of our nation—of our spirit. There are some who believe liberal democracies and free societies cannot cope with these sorts of challenges. We will prove them wrong here in Australia. Today we are saying that we both can do this and will do this, and we will do this together. May God bless us all—all Australians—at this most difficult time.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (10:26): Yesterday Bondi Beach was empty. On a warm, sunny day, that famous strip of sand was as bare as the sky above it. Barely a few weeks into autumn, sporting fields are falling as silent as our favourite music venues and concert halls. The traffic has thinned out on the roads. Pubs and our restaurants will soon be empty. The sad reality is that people are losing their jobs. And this morning, at places like Frankston Centrelink, when I spoke to Peter Murphy, the queues had formed before that Centrelink was open.

Each day we become more unnerved and uncertain about where this is heading. But this is our new reality in a world partly shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic—a reality that joins us all together while, at the same time, forcing us to be physically apart. And it's a reality growing more confronting by the day. Most of our lives have not been directly affected by war, hunger or financial strife. They were stories our parents and grandparents told us. We listened to those stories and we pictured them in black and white. We thought we were the lucky ones. But we now directly affected by war, hunger or financial strife. They were stories our parents and grandparents told us. We listened to those stories and we pictured them in black and white. We thought we were the lucky ones. But we now

Fear and panic, of course, feed on uncertainty and inconsistency and, at the moment, those ingredients abound. This is a time for national leadership, consistent messages and clear directions. Today parents are concerned about whether to send their kids to school or not. People are anxious, and that is understandable. They know this is a big deal, and, when people feel that they can't control events, they seek comfort in what they can control. We've seen that exhibited around the country—that they have enough essentials such as toilet paper or pasta. That's a signal: seeking control over something in the face of the threat which is difficult for people to understand. They want to
go to the footy or go to the beach one last time because they mightn't be able to go next week. These actions might be regrettable, but hectoring will not help. Clear explanations and clarity will.

For our part, Labor has added to certainty. We've indicated publicly, each and every day, that we would be supportive of any bring-forward of health measures and we would support any economic stimulus legislation. This is in spite of not being included in the COAG process described by the government as a national cabinet. But it's also prior to seeing legislation. We have provided the government with the absolute certainty that, at the end of the process, we would put forward our suggestions and our views to try and improve the legislation but that we would not stand in the way of economic stimulus or the bringing forward of any proposed health measures. That is the responsible thing to do. That is consistent with the view that I put when my caucus colleagues and party members gave me the great honour of leading this party, which is 130 years old next year. It is the responsible thing to do. We will continue to be responsible and we will act today in a responsible and constructive manner, because I want to be known as the Labor leader, not the opposition leader.

The legislation today is not perfect. We would do more and do it sooner, but we will advance our arguments. This is not a time to prevent measures which, however imperfect, are necessary to be implemented. We do need unity and, above all, we need resolute action. We cannot succumb to the illusion that time is on our side. It is not. We will get to tomorrow only if we respect the urgency for action today. We need to be clear and unequivocal. You've heard all the messages: stay home, keep calm and wash your hands. Make no mistake: anything that feels like an overreaction right now isn't. Let this be our rule: if we think we're going to take action next week, we should take that action today. The last thing we want to do is to be looking back on this time in the near future and saying, 'If only we had done more and done it sooner.' Clearly more can be done and more should be done.

We outlined our views on the health response in my address to the nation last Sunday 15 March. At a time where so much is changing from day to day, I think, more than a week on, it stands the test of that time. The six points I made then were:

- More consistent advice—such as when to self-isolate and when to get tested
- Getting more people tested more quickly
- The fast tracking of fever clinics
- Expanding Medicare to allow people to call or Skype their GP
- A serious reduction in large gatherings of people
- Timely and comprehensive travel advice and restrictions that are updated more frequently.

We stand by that statement of just a week ago. We must listen to our smartest minds—our scientists, our doctors, our immunologists. Now is the time to listen, to learn and to act without delay.

This is about people's lives and then, of course, consequentially, their livelihoods, particularly the lives of many of our vulnerable people—our parents and grandparents, the disadvantaged and the First Australians. We owe them our best. It's pretty hard to self-isolate if you're homeless. This is also about our economy. We will support both stimulus packages not because they are perfect but because they are urgent. We want this package to work and to work quickly. People's lives are at stake. We're concerned about the lack of direct support that would keep people in their jobs. The business measures do not guarantee support for workers because it's calculated on people being in work in February not now or in the future. Youth allowance, Austudy and Austrade recipients do not receive the coronavirus supplement. Various visa holders also aren't getting the support we believe they need.

There are sectors that I think could be given more support. Today, of all days, we think of our teachers—what remarkable people! They're certainly not childminders. They're people who, each and every day, whether they work in the public system, the Catholic system or the independent system, create future Australians with their knowledge and their commitment, and we respect them for the work that they are doing.

We also think of other sectors that haven't got specific support at this point. The arts and entertainment industry—so important for the quality of our lives—needs, in my view, direct support in order to be sustained into the future so that, as we come out of this diabolical circumstance, we recognise that the quality of our lives isn't just about money; it's about culture and experience and community and belonging. And we will need that more than ever as we come out of this process.

We of course have expressed concerns about the early accessing of superannuation. Selling your super at the bottom of the market will risk squandering people's hard-earned retirement savings. It's also the case that if the superannuation industry is forced to sell assets at the bottom of the market that is not sensible economics.

We say to the government that we have been as supportive as possible and we will not be moving amendments where there is any doubt. We will give the benefit to the government. We are not looking for arguments; we are looking for solutions. But, on some of these measures, please listen to the arguments. Recognise that we, on this
side of the parliament, do represent, by the way, the largest political party in this parliament—the largest. Our views should be taken into account even though we will, as we've said, vote for the package if our amendments are not successful. We've given that commitment. But I believe we are right on that issue, and the government should consider alternative measures to put dollars in the pockets of low-income workers other than by doing it at the expense of the quality of life in their retirement.

In today's emergency session of parliament there are few of us here, but our actions today will be felt and measured for a very long time. We're elected to this place to serve the Australian people. Today we feel the weight of our nation's need. Never has our duty been so urgent. I lead a Labor team determined to be constructive, and Labor stand ready to play our role. We want to help the government to get it right and this parliament to get it right—all of us. We find ourselves in a time like no other. We, the Australian people, must in our isolation come together and remember who we are: we are the people who came together selflessly in the recent bushfire crisis. Now is not a time for 'me'; now is a time for 'us'. Let's spread kindness and humanity, not coronavirus. The months ahead will be difficult. There will be pain and suffering. Our country, our world, has changed, but this will not last forever. Things will be different after this.

I am an optimist. I have faith in the people of Australia, faith in our people's courage, faith in our people's sense of community and faith in our people's compassion for one another. That gives me the faith that we will get through this together.

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the House, I thank the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. We will now move to the legislation.

BILLS

Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020
Guarantee of Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020
Australian Business Growth Fund (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020
Assistance for Severely Affected Regions (Special Appropriation) (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020
Structured Finance Support (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020
Appropriation (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill (No. 1) 2019-2020
Appropriation (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill (No. 2) 2019-2020
Boosting Cash Flow for Employers (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020

First Reading

Messages from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced in relation to the Assistance for Severely Affected Regions (Special Appropriation) (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020, the Appropriation (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill (No. 1) 2019-2020 and the Appropriation (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill (No. 2) 2019-2020.

Bills and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Frydenberg.
Bills read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (10:46): I move:

That these bills be now read a second time.

The bills I introduce today represent the most significant set of measures to support the Australian community and the Australian economy outside of wartime.

We confront an enemy without a flag or a face, and we are deploying every weapon in our arsenal to defeat it. This is a Team Australia moment, and we call upon all sections of the Australian community to join in this struggle.

The measures in these bills represent a decisive and unprecedented response to the economic challenges posed by the coronavirus. The global and domestic economic environment has deteriorated. We now expect the economic shock from the coronavirus to be deeper, to be wider and to be longer. Our response, totalling $189 billion, or around 10 per cent of GDP, will provide the hope and support millions of Australians need at this difficult time.
The Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 is designed to keep Australians in jobs and businesses in business, and build a bridge to the recovery. These measures are consistent with our principles. They are targeted, they are temporary, they are scalable and they are based on our existing tax and transfer system. The measures contained in this package of bills are designed to bolster domestic confidence and household consumption, reduce cashflow pressures for businesses and support investment to lift productivity and to keep people in jobs.

The package targets four key areas:

- households, through two separate $750 payments to social security, veteran and other income support recipients and eligible concession card holders—around half of whom are pensioners; and a new time limited coronavirus supplement of $550 per fortnight to new and existing jobseeker payment, youth allowance jobseeker, parenting payment, farm household allowance and special benefit recipients. For the period of the coronavirus supplement, there will be expanded access to these income support payments and faster claims processing.
- cashflow assistance to help small and medium size businesses to stay in business, keep their employees and retain apprentices and trainees.
- investment support to 3½ million eligible businesses employing 9.7 million Australians, by lifting the instant asset write-off threshold to $150,000 until 30 June 2020, and by providing a 15-month investment incentive by accelerating depreciation reductions; and
- support for regions and communities that have been disproportionately affected, including those heavily reliant on industries such as tourism, agriculture and education. This is a decisive response and it will put Australia in the strongest possible position to secure our economy and return to strong and inclusive growth once the health challenge of the coronavirus has been overcome.

Enhancing the instant asset write-off: the government will provide immediate additional support for business investment by enhancing the instant asset write-off for small and medium-sized businesses. The threshold for eligible assets will increase from $30,000 to $150,000, allowing businesses to immediately deduct purchases of eligible assets each costing less than $150,000. To be eligible, assets need to be first used or installed ready for use in the period to 30 June 2021. Access to the instant asset write-off will also be expanded during this period to include all businesses with an aggregated annual turnover of less than $500 million, up from $50 million. On top of the 3½ million Australian businesses that were already able to access the instant asset write off, as a result of these changes, an additional 5,300 businesses which employ around 1.9 million Australians will be able to benefit from the instant asset write-off.

Backing business investment: we will provide support for business investment by allowing businesses with an annual aggregated turnover of less than $500 million to access accelerated depreciation reductions. Eligible businesses will be able to bring forward depreciations reductions of 50 per cent of the cost of certain assets they have committed to purchase after 12 March this year, if they are first used or installed by 30 June 2021. Around 3½ million businesses which employ 9.7 million people are eligible to benefit from this measure. The government will support employers to manage cash flow challenges and help businesses and not-for-profits, including charities, retain their employees and keep operating by providing a cash boost payment. This measure will provide at least $20,000 and up to $100,000 back to eligible businesses and not-for-profits, including charities. This will benefit around 690,000 businesses employing around 7.8 million people. Around 30,000 not-for-profits will also benefit.

We will also provide two rounds of economic support payments. In each round, the payment will be $750 for each eligible individual. The first economic support payment will be made to certain recipients of social security and veterans payments, farm household allowance, and holders of certain concession cards eligible in respect of a day in the test period from 12 March 2020 to 13 April 2020 to assist them in a time of economic uncertainty during the coronavirus outbreak. The second round of economic support payments will be delivered to a subcohort of those payment groups who received the first economic support payment. This second payment will not be paid to recipients of the coronavirus supplement on the test date. All other payment groups who are eligible for the first payment will be eligible for the second economic support payment providing they would ordinarily be residing in Australia in respect of the test date of 10 July 2020.

We're also amending the Biosecurity Act 2015 to allow for the Director of Human Biosecurity to delegate any or all of their functions or powers concerning human biosecurity control orders to senior executive officers of the Department of Health who are also human biosecurity officers. This will ensure some of the Commonwealth's key powers for responding to biosecurity threats, including the human biosecurity control order, can be implemented in an efficient manner should it become necessary to use them. It is vitally important that we have a range of
qualified medical personnel able to conduct administrative processes such as reviewing control orders to ensure they're being used in a way that is proportionate to the public health risk.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019 will also be amended to temporarily waive the environmental management charge for the next nine months. This charge mainly applies to tourism activities, and this waiver is intended to relieve the cost pressures on tourist program operators in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. A number of national park entry fees will also be waived administratively by the Director of National Parks.

The government will also support jobs for apprentices and trainees through this period of economic challenge by providing $1.3 billion for up to 70,000 small businesses, including those using a group training organisation, to support the retention of around 117,000 apprentices and trainees. This support, which will be in the form of a wage subsidy of 50 per cent for apprentices and trainees, will help ensure the continuing development of the skilled workforce that Australia's employers need.

Australia's aviation industry has been among the first sectors affected by the coronavirus outbreak. The sector is facing an unprecedented and sustained period of falling international and domestic aviation demand. The government will provide $715 million to support the aviation industry as it grapples with these challenges. The bill will refund aviation fuel excise and refund or waive charges levied by Air Services Australia on domestic airline operations. The bill also includes funding to reimburse domestic and regional aviation security charges. The provisions will apply to charges paid by domestic airlines since 1 February 2020, providing an upfront benefit of $159 million to our airlines to provide immediate relief.

The government will amend the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999 and A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999 to allocate extra allowable absence days for child care in addition to the current 42 days. The Minister for Education will have the power to prescribe where a family does not need to provide evidence in relation to additional absences related to coronavirus. The government is also waiving the current obligation of childcare services to enforce payment of gap fees for a particular event or circumstance and the period specified in a minister's rule. This will enable services to provide relief to families where exceptional circumstances require it for limited periods.

We are giving retirees more control over their superannuation. This bill also adjusts the superannuation minimum drawdown rates, reducing them by 50 per cent for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 income years. These rates prescribe the amount that an individual in the retirement phase must withdraw from an account based pension or similar product, depending on their age. This measure will help alleviate concerns of retirees regarding selling assets in a loss position, giving them greater control over their capital during a time of increased market volatility and assisting with retirees' confidence in the economy.

We're providing a temporary jobseeker payment and coronavirus supplement. Additional temporary financial support will be provided to working-age income support recipients through a coronavirus supplement of $550 per fortnight. This measure will provide streamlined access to income support and extended eligibility to income support payments for people whose income is significantly reduced by the economic impact of the coronavirus. The Minister for Families and Social Services will have the power to extend the coronavirus supplement in whole or in part to other categories of recipients of social services payments. This measure will also create a new category of crisis payment where a person will qualify for payments if there is a national health emergency such as the coronavirus and delay commencement of the simplifying income reporting act for up to a year to ensure Services Australia can focus on assisting people who require income support as a result of the coronavirus.

We're providing more flexibility in the Corporations Act. Treasury ministers will be given a time limited instrument-making power in the Corporations Act to grant time limited relief from regulatory requirements where these will interfere with the ability of companies to manage their businesses through the impacts of the coronavirus. Each instrument would be effective for up to six months from when the instrument is created.

We're providing additional assistance to business to trade through the crisis. The government will also provide a safety net for businesses to allow them to get through a temporary period of insolvency and recover when economic growth picks up. To do this, we are amending the Corporations Act to temporarily increase the threshold for a creditor to initiate bankruptcy proceedings, to increase the time period for debtors to respond to a bankruptcy notice and to extend the period of protection a debtor receives after making a declaration or intention to present a debtor's petition. There will also be temporary relief for directors from any personal liability for trading while insolvent. For owners or directors of a business that are currently struggling due to the coronavirus, the Australian Taxation Office will tailor solutions for their circumstances, including temporary reduction of payments or deferrals or withholding enforcement actions, including director penalty notices and wind-ups. This will provide directors with additional confidence to continue to trade through this difficult period.
We're allowing early release of superannuation because this is the peoples' money. We're establishing a new temporary compassionate ground of early release of superannuation for individuals and sole traders impacted by the economic consequences of the coronavirus. This will allow impacted individuals to access up to $10,000 of their superannuation, tax free in 2019-20, and up to a further $10,000 in 2021. Applications must be made within six months of royal assent of this legislation and will be able to be made online via the myGov portal.

This bill amends the Medicare Levy Act 1986 and the A New Tax System (Medicare Levy Surcharge—Fringe Benefits) Act 1999, to increase the Medicare levy low-income thresholds, with increases for singles, families, seniors and pensioners to ensure these remain in line with changes to the consumer price index.

During this time of uncertainty, it's extremely difficult to formulate reliable economic and fiscal estimates over the next few months. In line with the government's decision to postpone the budget until later this year, the next intergenerational report will now be released in mid-2021 to ensure there is adequate time to produce long-term projections that are based on robust budget estimates. The government remains committed to producing an intergenerational report that assesses the long-term sustainability of government's finances. The charter will continue to require five-year updates of the IGR from 2021.

Over the coming months, this parliament will quite rightly be focused on responding to the needs of the Australian community. During the next six months, a number of acts passed by this parliament and a large number of legislative instruments are scheduled to sunset. Where an act or legislative instrument is scheduled to sunset on or before 15 October 2020, the bill will allow the minister responsible for the act or instrument to defer the sunset day by up to six months. This will ensure no gaps occur in our laws during this critical period.

The government understands the need to move quickly to provide support and relief to small and medium-sized enterprises that are under incredible pressure and play such an integral role in the Australian economy. We are providing a guarantee for new short-term loans issued by the authorised deposit-taking institutions, the ADIs, and non-ADI lenders to support SMEs to cover immediate cashflow needs in response to the economic crisis associated with the coronavirus pandemic. Importantly, the guarantee will apply to eligible loans made after the government's announcement of this measure, regardless of whether the loans were made before or after the commencement of the bill. There is an overall cap of $20 billion on the appropriation for meeting liabilities under the guarantee. In the event of a loan default under this measure, government will compensate the lender for an agreed proportion of the losses.

We're also providing additional support for Australia's small and medium-sized enterprises. The Commonwealth will be authorised to participate in forming and acquiring shares in or debentures of the Australian Business Growth Fund and appropriates $100 million for that purpose. The Australian Business Growth Fund's purpose will be to offer growing established companies patient equity capital and strategic support to assist them to reach their growth potential. Business seeking support can be from across Australia and from a range of industries. Established Australian businesses will be eligible for long-term equity capital investments between $5 million and $15 million where they can demonstrate three years of revenue growth and profitability and a clear growth vision.

We are providing support for severely affected regions. This response package will appropriate a further $1 billion from consolidated revenue funds to support those sectors, regions and communities that have been disproportionately affected by the economic effects of the coronavirus. Further plans and measures to support recovery will be designed and delivered in partnership with the affected industries and communities through the funding allocated in this package.

The government is also establishing the $15 billion Structured Finance Support Coronavirus Economic Response Fund and the Structured Finance Support Coronavirus Economic Response Fund Special Account. The fund will ensure continued access to funding markets impacted by the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic and promote competition and consumer and business lending markets. In particular, this will ensure that smaller lenders can maintain access to funding by the government making targeted investments in structured finance markets. To fund this package, the government is appropriating the necessary funds from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. The details of the measures contained in the package are set out in the explanatory memorandum to the bills.

These are extraordinary times demanding extraordinary measures, and I thank the opposition for facilitating the passage of these bills through the parliament. Led by our Prime Minister, with strength and courage, we face a global challenge like this country has never faced before. But, by working together, we will get to the other side of this and we will bounce back as a nation stronger than ever. We know there will be more to do and we will continue to do it to support every Australian in the challenges they face in the period ahead. I commend these bills to the House.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Zimmerman): I thank the Treasurer and, in accordance with the resolution passed earlier, the question is that these bills be now read a second time. I call the member for Rankin.

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (11:07): This is a defining test for our country and its leaders, and it's a defining test for our people and their parliament. This is a diabolical health challenge that we as a country are facing up to, and it has cruel and devastating impacts on the economy as well. Lives and livelihoods will be destroyed by the impact of this coronavirus. I think all sides of this House understand, appreciate and acknowledge that Australians are very anxious right now.

There's a lot of anxiety in the community, first and foremost, about our health and the health of the people that we love; anxiety about peoples' jobs, their job security and whether they can earn enough money during this difficult period to put food on the table for those that we care about and care for; anxiety about superannuation balances, particularly for those who are closest to retirement; and anxiety about all aspects of peoples' personal finances. Because of that anxiety, the depth and likely duration of this health crisis and economic crisis, this is no time for half-measures. It is no time for nickel-and-diming our response. It's no time for dithering and delay. We need to approach this crisis with clarity, with urgency and with coordination. It's true in the health challenges and it's true in the related economic challenges as well.

In an earlier time—during the global financial crisis—the defining advice that we received was that Australia and its economic decision-makers needed to go early, go hard and go households. The challenge for us today is to go big, to go fast and to go jobs and incomes. We need to do everything that we can possibly do to protect the lives and livelihoods of the Australians that we represent. I do know that every member of the House on this side appreciates the depth of that challenge and I know that every member of the government and every member of the crossbench appreciates that challenge as well.

As the Leader of the Opposition said in his contribution, responding to the Prime Minister's statement earlier on, we take our responsibilities very seriously on this side of the House and, for some time now, we have committed to being as supportive, responsible and constructive as we possibly can be. We appreciate that every Australian has an interest and a stake in the government getting this right. On this side of the House, since we first heard of this coronavirus and its likely devastating impacts, we have done all that we can to be as responsible, constructive and supportive of what the government is proposing.

I wanted to acknowledge to the Treasurer, who is still at the table, and the Prime Minister and their senior colleagues that we did have the opportunity to discuss some of these matters yesterday in the cabinet room and we appreciate that. We appreciate the opportunity to feed in from time to time. We would like more opportunities for that, but we appreciate the opportunities that have been afforded us. I think that meeting in the cabinet room yesterday was a symbol of what Australians expect from us and expect of us. They expect us to put the political swords down, at least for the time being, and they expect us to do what we can together to get Australian society, Australian communities and the Australian economy through this difficult period. I wanted to acknowledge the shadow health minister who has joined us. Every day of this challenge, he has been doing what he can to make the same kind of responsible contribution to the health response that I just outlined in relation to the economic response as well.

We do welcome substantial elements of the package that the Treasurer just ran through, contained in the bills that we will support today. Obviously, we welcome more support for small and medium-sized businesses going through an extraordinarily difficult period, a period so difficult it would have been almost unfathomable to many of these business people in recent months and recent years. Of course we welcome additional support, particularly for the most vulnerable people in our communities—the pensioners, the unemployed. We welcome that support. We welcome the decisive action taken by the Reserve Bank. We welcome the steps taken by the other banks in making sure that they can do their bit and play their role in getting people through this difficult period. There is much in this package that we welcome, and we want to make it clear to the Australian people outside of this building that when the government proposes something that we support we will say so and we will vote for it. That's what we're doing today.

Part of being a responsible, supportive and constructive opposition means making a contribution where we can to improve what the government has proposed. As I said, there are many welcome elements and we will be voting for the package that the Treasurer just outlined. We will do that today, as soon as possible. We have always said that we will expedite the passage of these bills, because we want to see this money circulating through the economy as soon as possible. But part of being constructive does mean pointing out where we think the package can be improved. In my view, there are at least five primary ways that we should try and do a better job here. The first one, and perhaps the most important, is that we need to find a way to inject more urgency into what is being agreed here today, what's been proposed and what's in the bills. I don't think it's good enough to say to Australian businesses, pensioners, families, communities, workers and others that the package that we will pass today won't
flow until the end of April, or until May when it comes to the deeming changes, or until July when it comes to the top-up in the pensioner support. We think it shouldn't be beyond us to agree a way to get this support out the door faster than the government is proposing. I will be moving an amendment which goes to the urgency that I think we can inject into the support that will be agreed today, and that amendment's been circulated in my name.

The second set of concerns that we have around the otherwise welcome support for small and medium-sized businesses is that there is not currently a guarantee that the funds which are being afforded to businesses will guarantee that workers will be kept on or that the money will be used to pay workers' wages. One of the reasons why other countries are investigating other models of wage subsidies is that we want to make sure that there is a link maintained between an employer and an employee. There is nothing in the way that this has been designed to maintain that link. There is nothing to prevent the severance of that link between an employer and their workers. We accept that there will be cashflow assistance for business and we welcome it. We fear that without a guarantee there is not a sufficient incentive for businesses to keep workers on. It may be that the cashflow assistance is probably more likely to be spent on things like rent and other costs of business, and we would prefer it if there was some link between the provision of this assistance and the actual holding onto employees and the paying of their wages throughout this difficult period.

The third set of concerns we have goes to the gaps in the package. There are issues with people who are here on visas, there are issues with students, and there are other issues as well. We've identified those. The fourth set of concerns we have is related. The government said even before the release of the second package that there will be a third package and subsequent packages after that. We do accept that the government will need to come to the table with more assistance as this crisis unfolds, but the point that we would make and the point that the shadow health minister has made in other contexts is: if you know that will be necessary then let's not wait. Let's try and get an additional support agreed and out the door as soon as possible. The reason that's related to the third set of concerns I raised about the gaps in the package is that if we know that there are gaps now then we should be looking to fill them as soon as possible.

So the first set of concerns were urgency, no guarantee of jobs, gaps in the package and, if there is going to be another package, getting it out the door as soon as possible. The fifth one goes to superannuation. We've made it clear publicly and privately, and the shadow minister will make a contribution shortly, that we wouldn't be going down this path of allowing broader early access to superannuation. We've been clear about that. We have concerns that encouraging people to divest right now in a market as weak as it is means that we might be encouraging people to crystallise those losses and that concerns us. We're worried about the impact on the system. We're worried that if people rush to take advantage of this change then that will be bad for the system not only in the near term but also in the long term. We're worried about the difficulties this will create for people in their retirement. We're worried that it's inconsistent to say, on the one hand, 'Here's an encouragement to divest from the share market via your superannuation fund,' at the same time as you're making what we think is a wise argument about the minimum drawdown—the part that we support in the superannuation changes.

We do think there should be relief for retirees in the drawdown phase of superannuation in relation to the changes to the minimum drawdown. That's a good change. We were in the process of proposing it when we heard that those opposite were contemplating it. That's a good thing. We support that. But that argument that you shouldn't be encouraging people to get out of the system at this time when the market is in the condition that it is in is inconsistent with the argument you're making about superannuation when it comes to early access. I think that there is an issue there. Ideally, that wouldn't be part of the package and we'd be finding better ways to support the same cohort of people.

As I have said repeatedly and not just today, and as the Leader of the Opposition said and many of my colleagues have said, we will be supporting these measures despite those concerns that we have. When it's not business as usual in the economy, when it's not business as usual in our society, then it shouldn't be business as usual in our politics either. We are being as accommodating, supportive, responsible and constructive as we can be. Every Australian has a stake in the government getting this right.

The government have at least two tests that they've set for themselves. The first one, which was in the Prime Minister's contribution to the Australian Financial Review Business Summit a couple of weeks ago, we agree with. He said that the test is to prevent job losses and prevent business closures, and that is an important part of the equation. The second part, which the government has been talking about more recently, is to support those people who have found themselves negatively impacted by this crisis and the weakening of the economy that's followed the outbreak. Those are the two tests that the government will be judged on: whether they can prevent job losses and business closures but also what they do to support people in the community, and especially what they do to support people who are displaced by this and people who are especially vulnerable.
I mentioned before the conversations that we have had with the government. We would like there to be more of that. We acknowledge that the Treasurer, in recent days, has agreed to a more regular briefing with Treasury about the economic conditions. We think that's a good thing. I appreciate that, and I want to convey that appreciation to him while he's here.

We also appreciate the engagement that has been happening with the Reserve Bank, with Governor Phil Lowe. I wanted to convey, via the House, to him and to his colleagues at the bank that we think that the package that they announced was decisive and has the capacity to make a genuine difference. I appreciate a great deal the opportunity to discuss and engage on that before it was announced. I'm sure my colleagues appreciate the opportunity for us to be kept in the loop as well.

The same goes for the private banks. I acknowledge that government has been working with the banks on the announcements that they made last week. I appreciate the engagement that we had with them too, to make sure we could be as supportive as we could as soon as we could after that announcement was made. I put that on the record too. The same goes for the peak business groups and the same goes for the union movement. There's been lots of consultation, and that's a very good thing.

I want to shout out to the health workers of this country. It must be an extraordinarily difficult time to be a health worker. My mum was a nurse for almost five decades, and I know the pressures on that industry in normal times, so the pressures now on that industry must just be extraordinary. The whole nation stands with the health workers of this country. We are counting on them—we always do, but especially now—as they do the most incredibly selfless work to try and alleviate the suffering of people who are and will be affected by this diabolical health crisis. To the retail workers who have been under pressure: as the SDA says, nobody deserves a serve. We need to make sure that we are kind to retail workers. They have been under extraordinary pressure.

To the teachers of Australia and the early educators: I assume it is the same for all of us here who are parents—every day, when your young fellow or your daughter says to you, 'Am I putting the uniform on today?' you think about all the decisions that people are making about sending their kids to school. They are very difficult decisions. Think about what that means for the teachers and early educators who go to work each day with 25 or 30 kids and are trying to educate those kids on all the things we need them educated about, at the same time as they're educating them about all the other pressures that are going on right now. It's pretty amazing. My Leo is five. He is in prep. He is a hugger, a bit like his dad. Telling him he can't hug his friends is a big ask.

Mr Frydenberg interjecting—

Dr CHALMERS: Reward him with a lolly, the Treasurer says! He gets a bit of that. The point I am making is that I want to acknowledge the parents, teachers, early educators and everyone who works in the education system. They are confronted with some extraordinarily difficult decisions to make.

I said yesterday in the media, and I want to repeat here today, that one of the things we are learning about ourselves, as we reflect on what this crisis is doing to us and to our country, is really that amazing role that grandparents play. They are the unsung heroes of our economy and our community. In my own case, there is the idea that my kids won't see their Nan for a bit. With all the contribution and help that my mum and Laura's mum and dad provide when they're up from Adelaide, we are appreciating just how much grandparents contribute. We should recognise that as well.

I also want to recognise the Treasury officials and other officials—PM&C and Finance—and I would ask the Treasurer to convey from our side of the House our appreciation to that really fine department. The Australian Treasury is one of the best public economic institutions in the developed world. It is a special place, as the member for McMahon says. It is full of patriotic, intelligent, amazing people who are the cream of the crop in the Australian Public Service. We know that from our own experience during the GFC. I had the privilege of working with many of these people for 5½ years. They are amazing people. They work around the clock. We thank you, the Treasury officials and the other officials who have been working on this package and doing their best for Australia to help us get through this period.

We don't know how long this crisis will last. We don't know how many lives will be lost. But we do know that at some point history will judge what we did here. History will judge the decisions that we took, the timeliness of those decisions and the impact of those decisions in time. We want it written about this period that we approached these challenges in the spirit of bipartisanship, where that's possible; that everybody behaved in a responsible and constructive and supportive way; and that we did what we could to agree on the best steps forward. We want it written about this period that we acted with urgency, with clarity and with coordination, and that we worked together in a way that the Australian people have every right to expect of us. Every Australian right now is anxious. They're worried about what this all means. The onus on us here as we deliberate and decide on some pretty massive proposals in this bill—tens of billions of dollars—is to
do that in the right spirit and that a way in which, when the history of this period is written, people can say that these were defining tests for our people and their parliament, for our country and its leaders and that we passed those tests. I move:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

"whilst not declining to give these bills a second reading, the House calls on the Government to more quickly implement the measures it is proposing, noting that under the current proposal:

(1) the Coronavirus supplement will not begin until 27 April 2020;
(2) expanded access to the Jobseeker Payment and Youth Allowance won't begin until 27 April 2020;
(3) most people won't receive the first payment to households until April 2020 or the second payment until July 2020;
(4) pensioners won't see a boost in their income due to the change in deeming rates until 1 May 2020; and
(5) employers won't receive a cash flow boost until 28 April 2020”.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Zimmerman): Is the amendment seconded?

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (11:30): It is. The member for Rankin has very eloquently outlined that we support the measures because they are appropriate for these desperate times—desperate measures for desperate times. Despite our reservations about some of them, we will not stand in the way. Of course, the ultimate stimulus is to defeat this disease. The best rescue package for the country is to beat coronavirus. I've heard some people say the government has to balance the economic impact with the health impact. I disagree. The best economic policy in this environment is the best health policy. The sooner we stop the spread of this disease, the better our country is, the better our economy is, the better our society is.

We have to be honest with the Australian people: it's currently not happening. We have to be honest with the Australian people not in a partisan way. If we want the people to trust us, we have to trust them with the facts. And the fact of the matter is that this virus is doubling in reach every three days. If it continues on that trajectory, our health system will be under enormous pressure. Our health system will be stretched beyond the limit. That's why it's incumbent on government to lead on business and community and individuals to cooperate and follow the lead of government to beat the spread of this disease. Hence, we've supported every single measure the government has proposed from the beginning, some of which, looking back, shouldn't have been controversial, knowing what we know now, but were at the time; some of which I had complaints from Labor Party supporters saying: 'Why are you giving the government so much support? Stop agreeing with them on these things.' I had to respectfully say that this is a time when we need to support the government in an environment which is rapidly changing. But that doesn't mean that we won't also call for more or that we won't also make constructive suggestions about what more can and should be done. We've done so and we'll continue to do so. That's our job as a constructive opposition. I'll just outline a few of those areas. I'm not going to cover them all—I'm going to leave plenty of time for other members to make contributions—but I'll outline a few of the very important ones.

Firstly, in relation to testing, the World Health Organization has made it clear that the key to beating this virus is to test, test, test. That's what other countries have done that are showing success. I want to make it crystal clear that the government and the country have done much better than many other countries. I want to make that clear. What I've seen happening in some countries is mind-boggling—the low level of testing. I don't mind saying here in this chamber that the United States is the key example of that. But we should be the best in the world. Australians deserve nothing less. We're testing 3,300 people per million. That's a good figure. South Korea is testing 5,500. That's a better figure. Again, I want to make it clear that I don't for one second underestimate the complexity of the task facing the minister and the government—the shortage of reagents and other things. We believe it should be the objective of government to test every Australian with symptoms—not everybody who wants a test, not everybody who feels like a test, not everybody who asks for a test but every Australian who presents to their general practitioner with symptoms we believe should get a test. That should be the objective of government. I'm not saying it's easy. It should be the goal, the aim, the hope. The Deputy Chief Medical Officer has made clear the criteria they've recommended to government is based on the number of tests available. He said, 'If we had unlimited tests, we might have different criteria'. Of course, I understand the constraints that the Chief Medical Officer and his state and territory colleagues are working under in this regard, but I stress the view that we should have the objective of having the best testing regime in the world—that is currently South Korea—and we should be able to say that we are testing everybody with symptoms.

The other matter I want to touch on is telehealth. Some Australians at home might not understand what I mean by telehealth. It's very simple: it's being able to ring your doctor, Skype your doctor or in some way communicate with your doctor from home—and not just your doctor but also, ideally, your allied healthcare professional, your dietitian, your psychologist, your counsellor and others. There are some for whom it's not possible—it's pretty
hard for a physiotherapist to provide a telehealth consultation, or a podiatrist, in some instances. They're going to be doing it very tough. But where a medical consultation can occur over the phone or over some form of technology, it should be allowed to happen.

The government has expanded the telehealth rebate, but I say not by enough. I can see no reason that the telehealth rebate shouldn't apply to every Australian, every doctor and every allied healthcare professional where appropriate. And, importantly, it should apply to doctors and others working from home. At the moment the rules are that it has to be done from the surgery—the telephone call has to occur in the surgery. That makes no sense to me. If you've got a doctor working from home, for obvious reasons—maybe they're self-isolating; the chances of being exposed to this virus for our medical and healthcare workforce are much higher than for the rest of us, so they may be self-isolating—they should be able to continue their service to their patients over the phone and to provide bulk-billed Medicare service by phone or Skype. This is absolutely essential, in my view. I say, not in a point-scoring way, that I don't understand the reluctance. The government's throwing billions at this problem, as they should. Throw some more at telehealth and provide the support to our healthcare professionals to do the job they do so well.

The final point I want to make—as I said, I'm not going to cover the field; I'm not going to talk about everything—is a new one. I understand that everybody's focused on physical health. I completely understand that and I agree with it. We also need to begin to focus much more on mental health. Australians are worried and stressed. Children are worried and stressed. If you have an existing mental health issue, that will be exacerbated. Many Australians have stopped going to see their psychologist or their counsellor. Today I'm writing to the Minister for Health with a range of suggestions that should be taken up, in our view: about telehealth, about support for Lifeline in this crisis and their new text service, which provides support for Australians who need help via text. These are sensible suggestions. There's an obligation on all of us to look out for each other—while practising social distancing—to check on your neighbours and your friends and family. There's an obligation on all of us, of course, to do that. There's an obligation on government as well to lead on mental health, and I make the suggestions in good faith.

We all understand the seriousness of the task before the House, before the government and before the country. The member for Rankin referred to it. We feel the weight of history on our shoulders here. This has often been compared, including by myself, to the last big national health crisis that our country faced: the pandemic of 1918-19, the Spanish flu as it was called in the day. It's true; this is the biggest crisis since then. I know a little bit about that pandemic. It came in two waves. Australia got through the first wave pretty well. We applied strict quarantine. We applied the best health advice of the day and restrictions on movement, and we got through pretty well. The rest of the world suffered the first wave, the 1918 wave, very badly, and Australia did well.

Then we got complacent. We relaxed. We lifted the quarantine restrictions. The second wave was devastating for Australia: 102,000 Australians gave their lives in the flu pandemic. One of them was my great-grandmother, Magdalene McNally, who died at age 29 a few years after giving birth to my grandmother. Obviously, I never knew her; she died 50 years before I was born. I don't know what her personality was, what she felt about life, what she felt in her dying days—I have no idea. I have one photo of her, her wedding photo. That's all I know about my great-grandmother. But I know this. The impact was long lasting. Eighty years after her death, as my grandmother was dying, and it was obvious to all—to her and to us, her children and grandchildren—that she was dying, we asked her: 'Where would you like to be buried, Nan?' Eighty years after the death of her mother, she said, 'Put me next to mum, please', which is exactly what we did. Eighty years of grief that she went through, not having really known her mother—her mother died when she was an infant. Eighty years later we remedied that the best we could, by burying her next to her mother, burying them together, reuniting them.

May as few Australians as possible have to go through that in this public health crisis. May we minimise the grief and the loss. We cannot accept defeat. We cannot accept that this virus is going to kill Australians. We know the size of the task. We know the enormity of the project. As other countries have arrested the spread of this virus, so must we. It means sacrifices for all of us, sacrifices across the country, but tackle it and beat it we must.

Mr MARLES (Corio—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11:42): I remember very clearly the night of 11 September in 2001. Late that night, having just finished watching an episode of West Wing, what came up on our screens was an extraordinary image—smoke coming out of one of the Twin Towers. A plane had hit it, the commentators were saying. There was actually a plane that, in the aftermath of the Second World War, hit the Empire State Building by accident, and so immediately I thought that was what had occurred. But in the time it took me to go from looking at this extraordinary vision, to going to the bathroom and coming back a second plane had hit the other tower, and September 11 had taken place. At that moment our world changed forever. I barely went to sleep that night, like so many Australians as we watched this astonishing event play out on our televisions. From that day until now I have absolutely believed that that would be the most significant historical event that I
would live through. But as we look at what's playing out in the world today and we think about what the next few months hold for our country, perhaps, amazingly, a different story is actually going to be written.

There is best and worst practice out there in terms of how the coronavirus has been dealt with, but certainly, looking at the horrifying images coming out of Italy right now, for that country this is undoubtedly the worst crisis it has faced since the Second World War. So whatever else it means, the rhythm, the political rhythm, of this place will change. The claim and counterclaim which tends to be the way we live our lives in here, has stopped. Picking away at political scabs is not what it's about now. It's now about all of us working together to try and deal with this crisis. It doesn't mean that the opposition loses its voice. In fact, in this moment and in the months to come, criticism is going to be fundamentally important, but that criticism is offered in the most constructive of ways. It is essential that in this moment we have a very clear explanation, and national leadership, given to the Australian people which takes the Australian people into the government's confidence about what it is that they are facing, and with that a clear expression of a strategy for how to deal with it, with an identified endgame in mind. That is absolutely essential.

In November last year the coronavirus, COVID-19, jumped species into humanity in a wet market in Wuhan, in Hubei province, China. We don't know the animal from which it transmitted to humans or the person to whom it transmitted. It's understood that the source animal, as it is in so many of these diseases, is the bat. The first case was confirmed in Wuhan on 17 November 2019—just four months ago; all that has occurred has played out in the last four months. Australia had its first case confirmed on 25 January 2020—a person returning from Guangzhou province. Around that time the governments of Australia set up the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, which has been meeting every single day since then. Its knowledge about what this disease is and how it will spread is at global best practice.

In Hubei we saw 1,921 new cases reported on 2 February. That peaked on 12 February, when 14,840 new cases were reported. It was around that time that China put in place strict social isolation measures in Hubei to stop the transmission of this virus, because this virus relies on human contact in order to spread. In China they dramatically stopped human contact. Amidst all the difficult stories that we're hearing, one of the most remarkable is that on 11 March this year only eight new cases were reported in Hubei. On 17 March, just a week ago, the number went down to one, and in the last four days of reporting they've not had a single case. Effectively, the rate of new infection in Hubei province right now has been reduced to zero. In South Korea we saw the first cases reported in mid-February. On 3 March it peaked at 851. Again, social isolation was put in place in South Korea. By 16 March new infections were down to 74 for that day.

Now Hubei is reporting 67,800 infections. Even if we were to assume that that is widely underreported, even if we were to assume that there are a million cases in Hubei, it's still less than two per cent of the population of that province. There are 3,144 people reported to have died of coronavirus in Hubei. In South Korea there have been 8,897 cases reported. If we were to assume that it's 50,000, again, we're talking about 0.1 per cent of the population of South Korea. There have been 102 deaths reported in that country. This is global best practice. This is a set of policies which has made a difference.

Then we have the tragedy which is Italy, where social isolation measures took some time to be put in place and the disease was allowed to spread. On 26 February—less than a month ago, just a few weeks ago—Italy reported 147 new cases. To put that in context, 160 new cases were reported in Australia on 19 March. From there, 26 February, through to the last report, because this virus spreads exponentially. It is a mathematical exponential equation—one right now which is seeing the number of infections in this country double every three days. Please understand what that means. It means that what is 1,000 today will be more than 30,000 in just over two weeks unless we do something to change that. What that requires is for us to act now. So whatever is being contemplated in terms of social isolation in two, three or four weeks from now, do it right now.
Do it today. That has to be the strategy which aligns us with global best practice and stops the transmission of this disease. It is not about a proportionate response. It's about doing as much as you possibly can in the context of an exponential graph when the graph is as flat as possible, because every single transmission makes dealing with this problem so much harder in health terms and also in economic terms.

The stimulus which we support today is really important. Obviously, we have made criticisms of the fact—with a similar principle—that payments we would see in April, May or even July are not being made right now. They should be. We should be really careful about how we treat superannuation. This is not the time to be selling in superannuation. We need to be thinking about responses which enable employers to maintain their relationship with their workforce and actually to keep them on. That said, the urgency of the moment requires the supporting of this bill, and so we do. But we also need to understand this: the stimulus package is dealing with a symptom of the disease. If we want to deal with an economic shock which is caused by a virus, then we must deal with the virus itself.

I acknowledge in advance all of those who work in our essential industries—in food distribution, in logistics and in emergency services—and within our Defence Forces, who are going to be called to do much work in the coming weeks and months. I particularly want to acknowledge those who work in our health sector and those who provide services in-home to our most vulnerable—our elderly and our disabled—because it is you who are going to bear the brunt of this crisis over the coming months. The Anzac spirit has been invoked today—rightly so—but it's those who wear the uniform of health who actually carry this spirit forward. Our hearts are absolutely with you at this moment. We think about all of those who are experiencing pain right now: those who have already lost their jobs, those who are queuing up at Centrelink offices and those who have visited loved ones in aged-care centres, perhaps wondering whether they have visited them for the last time. I particularly acknowledge those who work in the aged-care sector: you are looking after the people we care most about.

Not for a moment do we underestimate the complexity of this issue which is facing the government. The Prime Minister, the health minister, the Treasurer and, indeed, the entirety of the government face an enormous burden. Fate has dealt them the fortune of dealing with one of the greatest crises that our country has seen. They wear a very heavy burden—but, actually, all of us do. All of us wear that burden in supporting the government through this.

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We... will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The … trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.

Those words were spoken almost 160 years ago by America's greatest President in the midst of America's greatest ordeal, and they highlight the burden which is upon all of us in dealing with this challenge. Our hearts are heavy with its responsibility. But I know that every person in this chamber pledges themselves to the cause of our nation and seeing Australia through one of the greatest ordeals in our history.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (11:56): In our response to this crisis we must remember, first and foremost, one thing: it is about people. Sometimes when we talk about the economy we talk about figures and macro numbers. But, at the end of the day, this is about our people—maintaining the health of our people amidst the coronavirus epidemic but also then maintaining their economic health and wellbeing as people. What we know about humanity is the central role that having a job plays, not just in terms of your income but also in terms of your identity—who you are and being able to participate in and contribute to society. That's why Labor has approached this crisis with an eye firmly on just one thing—not on politics, but on one thing: maximising people's health and maximising their economic wellbeing. We have put partisanship aside and we will continue to do so.

That's why we will support the legislation that is before us today, the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 and related bills. This is not the legislation that a Labor government would introduce. A Labor government would, for a start, be acting with more urgency. A Labor government would have reconvened this parliament last week, not this week. A Labor government would have been making payments not with an eye for the $750 of it kicking in in the next quarter; we would have been putting money into people's pockets to spend immediately we made that announcement.

But this government always has an eye on the politics—always. That's why we on this side haven't been invited to participate in the so-called national cabinet. That's really just COAG phone hook-ups—and I note the rather bizarre spin put out by this government on that in today's newspaper. I certainly don't take it personally. It's the right of the government to determine these matters—and it has, consistent with the approach that this government takes to participation.
Our actions stand in stark contrast to the actions of the then coalition opposition during the global financial crisis. I don't relish from that, because that's all on the record—the dozens of divisions that we had late into the night, with them opposing protecting people's jobs and them opposing economic stimulus, which they said was too great. Well, let me say this: we are all Keynesians now, and the government's rhetoric on Labor's economic record should be consigned to the dustbin of history, as should their nonsense about the impact of what we did to protect jobs, which, yes, did result, therefore, in us not bringing down budget surpluses. Their hubris which said that we were already in surplus, I think, should cause them some embarrassment, but it should also cause them, I would hope, an opportunity to reflect on the damage that that rhetorical position has, because it leads to errors of judgement, which is why last year—when this economy was suffering from stagnant wages, falling consumer demand, three interest rate cuts, cuts to the projections of economic growth, and rising underemployment up to two million—this government did not act throughout that, because it was focused on the politics rather than what the economics required.

We will be supporting this package in spite of the weakness that we see, because, in my electorate of Grayndler in the inner west of Sydney right now, there's something unusual going on that will remind people, in a strange kind of way, of what's happening in our economy. There are people queuing outside Centrelink, which is just down from my electorate office. It goes around the corner to Illawarra Road. There are people queuing in Leichhardt Centrelink office as well. But there's something else happening, which is that there's silence above their heads. If you know Marrickville, where I live and work and which I represent, you'll know that there are normally, at this point in time, 70 movements an hour above people's heads, and every one of them will have an impact on my electorate. But it's pretty quiet. That's the silence of job losses that people can't hear but can feel. It's having an impact right now. We are losing jobs right now with the downturn. So our thoughts go out to the baggage handlers, the flight crews, the cleaners, the check-in staff and the caterers—the airport staff. Sydney Airport is the largest driver of employment in my electorate. There are some in the Greens party and others who say, 'Shut Sydney Airport.' I've always defended it as a creator of jobs, and I've been consistent in that, with regard to economic activity across the board.

We think of those people who are really doing it tough today. Qantas's decision to stand down 20,000 workers from one company in one day had an enormous impact. If you reflect on what that human impact does and multiply it—be conservative and say each one of them has a dependent partner and one child—you're talking about 60,000 people impacted by that decision, with one company. You need to think of all the hospitality workers who will struggle to keep their jobs. We need to think of all those people. I have a big representation of the arts community—all those musos, producers and people working in theatre and film who will not be able to perform. We think of those teachers who are doing their best—with uncertain messages coming through, it's got to be said, but who are absolutely devoted to making the lives of the young people they teach better in the future. We think of every cafe owner who's suddenly got a whole lot of bills but no customers, and every older Australian who's already very anxious because they know that this disease can impact anyone and can cause significant health impact for anyone—including young people, but we know that older people are particularly vulnerable. And now they have been denied even the consolation of a cuddle with their grandkids. I note the very moving comments by my friend and colleague Jim Chalmers on Insiders yesterday about the measures he's had to take with his own very young children and their respective grandparents.

This is having just an enormous impact, and that's why we in Labor won't stand in the way of this legislation. But we do say that throughout this period we've sought to point out the gaps and inconsistencies. We note there's been some change from the government since yesterday—I think in part because of our advocacy about when some of the payments will be made available—but not enough. We need to get this money out the door. Just like for the health impacts, the sooner we act the better it is, the more effective it is. We know that occurred in our response to the global financial crisis. Those $900 cheques, much derided by those opposite, were successful in creating that confidence in the economy. We know there are no guarantees that the business support mechanisms will ensure that people are kept in work. We know, in fact, there are no incentives to keep people on because of the way that it's been designed. We know that, as a proportion of peoples' wages, it's far less than what comparable industrialised nations are doing. In the UK, there is an 80 per cent subsidy; here, effectively, there is a 20 per cent subsidy but with no guarantee at all that that 20 per cent will flow through to any employee being kept on, so we know that's a weak strategy. At the same time, the government are incentivising people to diminish their future retirement incomes by drawing down on their super at the worst possible time for that to occur. Once again, the government never miss an opportunity to undermine our compulsory superannuation system that they opposed when it was introduced and have sought to undermine at every opportunity.

We know that during the recent bushfire crisis, we saw the best of Australia—friend helping friend, neighbour helping neighbour, stranger helping stranger. We know that people in the rural fire services, in particular the
volunteers, went out of their way to help. As I went around the country, when I was with Susan in the electorate of Macquarie, her brigades had been up in Tenterfield, up on the North Coast and then afterwards were also down the South Coast. Throughout the country, we saw the best of Australia, and I hope that's what we see here as well.

I also say to the government that one of the things put to me last week when I had a business roundtable with the member for Eden-Monaro, Mike Kelly, in Bega and the mayor of Bega Valley, Christie McBain, was that businesses were very concerned that they would be forgotten. These communities have suffered so much since last year for a prolonged period of time. We know the government budgeted its support package for just one-quarter of the notional $2 billion to go out in this financial year. It's beyond my comprehension why that one-quarter remains the case, in spite of the fact that we have such a substantial stimulus package before us that we're supporting today. It is beyond my comprehension how that can be acceptable—that three-quarters of it is put off into the never-never. These communities have suffered now a double whammy. They're now affected by the coronavirus just as much as anyone else, and I'd say that the government needs to—and I know there will be more packages—have a look at those measures.

But we will support this. We will be moving amendments that are constructive, that would improve the package and help government to get it right. We know that we need to act with the greatest urgency. Time is not on our side. We can't take anything for granted. But I am confident that we can come through this. We can come through this together, but I'd urge the government to listen to our constructive proposals, amend their package to improve their package, and Australia will be better off for it—our health will be better but our economy will be better as well.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (12:10): I'd start by moving an amendment to the second reading amendment that was moved by the member for Rankin. I move in respect of the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020:

That the following words be added:

"(6) there is no conditionality on assistance measures to business to keep workers employed; and

(7) calls on the Government to legislate for a mechanism that provides sufficient incentive for employers to keep employees in work"

A few weeks ago we were talking about the need to make sure that casuals self-isolated. We knew there was a risk at that exact point, prior to the government providing the enhanced Newstart payment, that a very large number of people in insecure work were going to be faced with the decision to either protect the health of their fellow workers, if they were told to self-isolate, or hide their symptoms because they needed to make sure they could pay the bills. We've been making the case for that for weeks. We called for parliament to sit last week.

In that time countless casuals have faced the choice and an unknown number of them went to work anyway. It's not just casuals. It's gig workers. It's people with insecure work. It's freelancers. It's sole traders who are in a situation of having to choose between the health of their fellow workers and making sure that they could pay the bills. This is why the opposition has been saying we need to move quickly, because today we're making a decision about the Newstart payment where we would have had a better public health situation had that decision been made in this parliament a week or two weeks ago. And in the gap we don't know the impact that it's had on the spread of this virus, but we know it was one of the factors that was determined early, that was pointed out early, to which there was a fix and we have waited until today for that to occur.

Today, given the spread, we are now in a situation where we are facing something much graver than whether or not people get two weeks leave. We are now in a circumstance where we are watching people on a mass scale lose their jobs and we are facing a very different period of unemployment to how unemployment has previously hit Australia during periods of downturn.

Normally you've got a broad economic downturn and you can try to keep people in jobs. But if the company is not going to make it, it's not going to make it. Here we have a downturn caused by deliberate conscious decisions of government. Now we don't argue with those decisions. We argue that some of them should have been made earlier, but the fact that those decisions have been made is not something we object to. But that has meant that businesses are now folding not because they weren't viable but because there's been a government decision that they must close their doors, and more of those decisions are coming. That means, instead of the normal situation of saying, 'Okay, more people are going to be on unemployment benefits and we'll try to stimulate,' this is a situation where, at the end of this, we want people to return to the same job with the same employer in the same business and, during this period, to have been able to stay in their own home. That's what we're wanting to do. If people simply move from work to welfare, they won't be in a situation where they've retained the relationship with their employer, and a whole lot of people won't be in a situation where they've been able to maintain the payment of those bills.
If you look at what the government has designed, they keep explaining it by saying that, because it's based on withholding tax, they have linked assistance to business to whether or not they are employing people, but that's not how they've designed it. The way it has been designed is that a business gets paid this quarter based on their payroll last quarter. If you have two businesses with the same withholding tax but one of them sacks all its workforce this quarter and the other keeps all of its workforce on, they get the same payment. That's not a way of keeping people in work. Yes, we acknowledge that businesses need the support right now, and we welcome that, but let's not pretend that that's a policy that will keep people in work. If a business has been told that they have to close their doors because of social isolation—and we are all getting calls from these businesses right now working on what on earth they're going to do—if they've no money coming in and they're told, 'The government will provide a small percentage subsidy of their workforce', a 20 per cent subsidy doesn't do the trick. Why do we say a 20 per cent subsidy? This is the other bit of messaging that the government uses—which, I've got to say, is great messaging but doesn't help with understanding—'They will now provide back 100 per cent of the withholding tax.' But what does 100 per cent mean for a payroll? If you're a high-wage earner, that's probably still only 40 per cent of your overall income. For the median wage, it's only 20 per cent of the income. Places like the United Kingdom right now are saying to employers, 'We will provide an 80 per cent wage subsidy so that workers stay with you and so that you can keep them on even in your most difficult hours', while Australia is saying, 'We'll provide a 20 per cent subsidy for people on the median wage, and, in fact we'll pay it based on who you used to employ, not on who you employ now.'

The government may come back and fix this in a few weeks time, but every day we are seeing livelihoods destroyed. The Prime Minister has settled on a mantra of 'We're not going to panic', but we're not saying panic; we're just saying act. The businesses that have been told to shut down are not going to wait a few weeks before they make a decision as to whether or not they keep on their workforce. The Centrelink queues today around Australia show that.

The other part of this, to try to keep people on at this time, is what the government's doing with respect to compulsory superannuation. They're encouraging people to sell at the bottom of the market, knowing full well that those individuals, who are the ultimate in-distress sellers, are being forced into that situation because not enough other support is forthcoming from the government. They're in a situation where their retirement will be permanently damaged by decisions made today.

I've heard those opposite talk about sending the bill to future generations. There is no greater example of sending the bill to future generations than encouraging people to take out their super at a time when they're distressed, when they're at the bottom of the market. That's before you get to the knock-on impacts it has on investment across industry.

I also, in the time remaining, want to say a little bit about my portfolio with respect to the arts. The arts and entertainment industries feed into the hospitality industry and, combined, are worth about $50 billion to the Australian economy. These are people who work gig to gig. They work event to event. They work festival to festival. In the course of one half-hour media conference, they watched their next six months of income disappear—that is, half a year's income gone in a half-hour media conference. They need a focused package and the government does not yet have one. When times are tough, we turn to them. And, I'll tell you, at the bushfire concerts that were held, the artists were all asked to perform for free, and they did. Pretty much a whole series of people working that day were still paid. We all just accept that we have to pay the technical people and we have to pay the security people, but let's ask the artists to work for free. We ask them to and they do. They stand up when we need them. Right now, they are relying on us to stand up for them, and we don't yet have a package that does that.

In a letter that I received, someone raised with me this very simple situation: she has a dependent son, she has $1,000 to her name, she has no work for the next six months and the rent where she's living is $560 a week. Do the maths and try to work out how that individual is going to now get by. We need something specific for this sector. And we need to focus on the mental health issues for that sector and the entire country. I am yet to hear a large mental health package coming out of this, at least for the arts sector. Please, if something happens, don't go past the organisation Support Act. Work with organisations that workers are used to dealing with and that are tailored. The mental health challenges of the mass unemployment that we are now facing are extraordinary.

Finally—this leads into the whole story—we've heard the shadow Treasurer say many times that we entered this crisis with less resilience than we should have because of softness in the economy. The arts sector entered this crisis with less resilience than it should have had because of years of cuts. Our aged-care system has entered this with a lack of resilience; that's why we're having a royal commission. The high levels of casualisation, gig workers, insecure workers and people who have no entitlement to leave mean we are entering this with less resilience than we should have. And the habit that has developed in this government of rejecting facts that are
demonstrably true is without a doubt part of the story of Australians not taking this as seriously when we need them to. We have entered this with less resilience than we should have. We now need the government to come forward with something stronger than what we have right now, because, if this is it, then the Australian economy and Australian lives are about to go through a period that nobody should wish for, and for many of them there are many aspects of it that we can avoid.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Is the amendment to the amendment seconded?

Mr Brendan O’Connor: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question now is that the amendment to the amendment moved by the member for Rankin be agreed to.

Ms CATHERINE KING (Ballarat) (12:22): We know that this is an unprecedented health crisis. Tragically, seven Australians have lost their lives, and more will do so before this ends. The number of positive cases is doubling every three days. We have a lot to do to contain this outbreak.

From the outset, Labor has sought to take a constructive approach to our engagement on both the health and the economic response. The health response must lead, but they are inextricably linked. That includes highlighting the deficiencies in the government's approach and injecting a sense of urgency that, frankly, has been lacking for too long. We will maintain the spirit of bipartisanship, but, as the alternate government, we must urge the government to do more and to do better.

On the health response, I urge the government to increase the level of testing of suspected COVID-19 cases, in line with the World Health Organization advice. Test, test, test! We should be testing every symptomatic person, quarantining positive cases in our hospital system, isolating all traceable contacts and introducing more and more social distancing measures. We absolutely have to do this, and we need to do it urgently.

I also urge the government to work with suppliers and our freight industry to improve the stocks of personal protective equipment, and to get these out to our health clinics as a matter of priority. The fever clinics being facilitated by the primary health networks need to be set up by next week—not May, as the government initially indicated. It is pleasing that the government has taken onboard Labor's calls to extend telehealth, but its response still falls far short of making sure that everyone can access health consultations by phone or video. The key response to the health crisis revolves around the rapid increases in social distancing and in travel restrictions to limit the spread of this virus. Everyone should be able to access medical advice from home at this time. People's lives depend on the government getting this right.

It is equally important that the government improves its communication with the Australian people. The mixed messages over the past fortnight have left Australians confused at this time of heightened stress and uncertainty. We know that, to limit the spread and to give us the best chance of getting through this, Australians must follow advice and limit their social contact. It is vital that the Australian government provide clear, consistent and simple advice. There have been times when this advice has not been consistent; the issue with schools is a clear case in point.

We know that the travel restrictions and social distancing measures so necessary for public health will have, and are having, a devastating impact on our economy and the livelihoods of so many Australian workers. For so many regional communities, this comes off the back of the devastating bushfires of this summer. Cruelly, these local communities had just started their long path to recovery. But, unlike a typical natural disaster, the COVID-19 outbreak and the necessary travel restrictions are not limited by geography.

Some of our biggest service sectors, including aviation, tourism, hospitality and the arts, have effectively shut down—not just this past week, when the government quite rightly intervened to take further social distancing measures; they had slowed down because of the lack of people travelling and the lack of people coming into our country to visit our tourism sectors, sectors that employ so many Australian workers both in our major cities and right across our regions. Casual workers have been told simply not to go back to work tomorrow, as there is no work for them. Permanent workers have been stood down without pay and asked to take all of their leave entitlements, with no guarantee that they will have any pay. Sole traders and small businesses have been left with absolutely nothing but rent and other bills to pay. Every one of these workers performs an important role in our economy and in our society. They put food on their families' tables, they help educate their children and they help keep other Australians employed as their wages and funds recycle through the economy and employ other people.

The priority for everyone in this place must be to support all of those Australian workers, to make sure that they still have work when we get through this. That's why yesterday's announcements are welcome. But they are clearly insufficient on a number of fronts. Firstly, they don't do enough to protect jobs and to support continuity of employment through this crisis. There is no guarantee that the cash provided to businesses will go to retaining staff or to their wages, maintaining that critical connection with employment and their employer. We have to
contrast it with what the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has done, in terms of wage subsidies, and—I never thought I would be saying this of a Tory prime minister—the determination he has had to ensure that connection to employment and that people get paid. When we contrast that with this package, we know that this government is falling far short of where it needs to be.

Most likely, we know, most of the money going to business is going to be spent on rent. We know that because we are hearing that every single hour, through our electorate offices, as people with small businesses are ringing up, saying: 'What do I do? I want to keep my staff on but I've also got all of these other expenses, and there is no relief for this.' But the amount of money provided in this package is clearly inadequate for people in small business to be able to both pay their rent and their outgoings and also continue to keep their workers connected to their business.

Unlike in other developed countries, very little of this direct support flows straight to households and to workers, and when it does, in fact, it's often too late. Business support does not kick in until April. The second supplement for pensioners is not paid until July. It's only after Labor raised this point that the income support measures will now kick in, as we understand it, on royal assent to these bills, not in late April as the government was saying yesterday and as originally planned. How on earth they thought the people who are queuing up today in their droves at Centrelink offices could wait for any money until April is absolutely beyond me. Many struggling households could miss out on support, particularly given that there has been no change to the income support test for Newstart, or the new jobseeker payment as it's called. Where one partner loses employment but the other is just above the income test, the family will not receive any assistance through the jobseeker payment at all.

Instead, the government's answer for many of these workers is to access funds from their superannuation accounts. Labor is particularly concerned about the government's approach here. In the same announcement yesterday, the government acknowledged that withdrawing superannuation now will crystallise losses with its reduction to the minimum draw-down requirements for retirees, not to mention that the average superannuation balance for someone in their early 30s was recently as low as $33,000 for women and $43,000 for men, before the recent market slump. These workers will lose half or more of the current balance of their retirement savings if they have to bail themselves out. Such a withdrawal not only crystallises losses from the current market slump but reduces an individual's retirement savings by many thousands of dollars as a result of lost interest earnings over the coming decades. Young people who have to resort to this measure will be paying for this in their retirement. They will absolutely be doing so.

Moving into the specifics of my portfolio, particularly our transport sector and in our regions: over the past week, our airlines have grounded most of their fleets in response to the rolling increases in travel restrictions, social distancing measures and the slump in tourism. Further capacity reductions will be announced as a result of the Prime Minister's announcements yesterday. Qantas has stood down 20,000 workers, two-thirds of its workforce. Virgin is likely to take similarly drastic steps, and regional carriers, led by Rex but including many other smaller carriers, are reducing capacity and have publicly expressed concerns about cash flow and that they may well go to the wall. Our airports, which rely on passenger movement for their financial viability and employ more than 200,000 Australians, are also being affected dramatically by the slowdown.

To those workers in our aviation industry facing an uncertain time: we hear you. We want you to be supported through this period so you can play your role in rebuilding this vital industry once travel restrictions are lifted. The current structure of two major airlines with budget partners and sustainable regional carriers is critical for hundreds of thousands of jobs in our airlines, airports and associated industries. It is critical for competition for consumers. We cannot make any guarantees from opposition, but I can assure everyone in this sector that we will maintain pressure on the government to better support you and your industry.

I have twice written to the Deputy Prime Minister and minister for transport requesting sector-specific support for the aviation sector. While Labor welcomed the government's aviation package worth up to $715 million announced last week, we note that it is not enough. With fleets grounded, waiving fees and charges incurred when flying is clearly not going to help with cash flow constraints, because airlines are not flying. As a major employer, the aviation sector need sufficient access to cash over coming months to continue their scaled-back services for essential travel and freight and to maintain employment for as many of their staff as possible.

The government's small-business package announced yesterday will provide assistance for cash flow for some of the smaller regional airlines. While the economy-wide loan limit of $250,000 is a good start for some of the smaller regional airlines, frankly, when you look at the scale of some of the larger airlines, they're obviously not going to be eligible, nor will it be sufficient. Our aviation industry has connected regional Australians to our cities and our country to the world for over 100 years. It has gone through many changes in this time. We know that the
Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton) (12:38): I rise to speak to the second reading amendment. First and foremost I want to reiterate the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition and fellow colleagues that Labor is supportive of the government's economic response in the two major packages which are being legislated in the bills before the House. From the outset of this health and economic crisis Labor has sought to, and will continue to, work responsibly and constructively with the government, including the passage of this legislation before the parliament. Labor will facilitate the passage of the bills to implement the measures that require legislation. While there are some welcome provisions in this package, as we've made clear, Labor is concerned that this response lacks urgency, leaves gaps in support and does not go far enough to protect jobs.

A key concern for Labor is that there is no guarantee that the support announced by the government for small and medium enterprises will actually get to workers. No measure announced today guarantees that support will be used to keep workers on, as outlined earlier by the Manager of Opposition Business. We are also concerned that the measure to boost cash flow for employers does not offer a substantive incentive and is not sufficiently linked to retain workers. Everyone in this place knows how important maintaining the link between employers and employees is, particularly during this unprecedented crisis, so that when it is finally over work can continue and businesses can build back up. It is a connection that is vital for society and indeed for economic growth.

What we are seeing at the present moment is businesses being told to shut down by governments to rightly contain the outbreak, but I don't believe the flow-on impact of that closure instruction has been sufficiently thought through. Businesses that are being told to shut down will immediately lose cash flow. These businesses have no idea how long they will be ordered to shut down for. How can they possibly budget for the future when they don't know how long they will be affected for?

In contrast to Australia, comparable countries are maintaining the link between the incentive and indeed the retention of employees. As other speakers have already said, in the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister announced that wages would be subsidised up to 80 per cent of median wages and conditional on the business maintaining the employment of those workers. I also understand that the wage subsidy will apply to firms where employers have already laid off workers due to the coronavirus as long as they are brought back into the workforce instead of being granted a leave of absence.
In New Zealand, our near neighbour, the government is offering COVID-19 affected businesses a subsidy of $585.80 per week for full-time employees who have 20 hours or more, and $330 a week for part-time employees. Businesses receiving the grant must make their best effort to retain employees and pay them a minimum of 80 per cent of their normal income for the subsidised period. However, Australia's approach—the government's approach—appears to fall much shorter in many instances. Look at a basic example: if a small or medium enterprise is employing staff at roughly around the median employee income of $50,000—meaning each year that employer will withhold about $7,800 in income tax—that is about $1,950 a quarter, or per BAS statement per employee. But that withholding is only 15.5 per cent—well below the UK's 80 per cent subsidy—and, in many instances, especially with the type of SME hit by the crisis, such as hospitality and tourism, wages of casuals and part-time workers may be much lower and therefore have a much lower effective tax rate. The government is yet to clarify what incentive is in the measure to retain employees the day after the March quarter BAS statement is reported. I'm concerned that as early as 1 April some marginal businesses may receive a cashflow measure but, because the subsidy is so low, will retrench their staff.

Labor notes that the cashflow measure is based on lodging BAS statements and the information about pay-as-you-go withholding for employees. This will result in cashflow funds not getting paid mid-to late April—possibly a month or more after the initial measure proposed. Again, frankly: too little, too slow. In addition, we hold concerns that cashflow assistance to business will arrive too late and will not help otherwise viable businesses most at risk of collapse. We need this government to learn from the mistakes made in getting cash to businesses during the bushfires. The money for bushfire affected businesses is not getting out the door. When cash flow is king, the need for speed is critical.

One of our key concerns is that there's a lack of urgency in the rollout of these otherwise welcome measures. Businesses, workers, families and pensioners need support right now, not in a month's time or in four months time. Too many of these measures don't even kick in until the end of April. Some of them don't kick in until May and others, like the second support payment for pensioners, until July. Just two weeks ago, I was on Kangaroo Island for my second visit, talking to local businesses severely directly and indirectly affected by the fires, and what was abundantly clear was they were still struggling because the support, although promised, had not reached them. This cannot happen again. This cannot happen now and not on this scale across the nation. I'm also concerned about the package lacking more substantial support for sole traders and the self-employed to help them stay in business. Sole traders appear to be forced into seeking the jobseeker payment or seek an early release of superannuation. Those who are eligible to receive the coronavirus supplement or who have had their income or hours significantly reduced as a sole trader are eligible to withdraw from their superannuation $10,000 in this financial year and a further $10,000 in the next financial year. This risks undermining retirement incomes and compromising financial system stability and should have only been used as a last resort.

I am concerned about the lack of sufficient support and planning for essential and strategic industries. That includes but is not limited to the airline industry—as the member for Ballarat just talked about—the childcare sector, the arts and others. In fact, I think the government may need to consider planning in several areas that will support industry specific measures, and that might be something the government is considering. I'm talking to industry stakeholders about what their specific needs are and I'm very happy to talk to my counterparts in government—the minister for industry, the minister for employment and other ministers if need be—about those industry specific matters that may have to be considered in light of the huge challenge that confronts the nation.

I think over the coming weeks the government will need to consider buying equity as a form of crisis business support in key businesses and industries, with conditionality. It is something that should be on the table. It should be considered. The merits of it should be considered, but it should be something that the government is open to considering. Although Australians understand the severity of the crisis, in-kind transfers and cash bailouts are unlikely to be popular and are less likely to align the incentives of that firm and their shareholders with broader economic outcomes such as income support for workers. As such, I call on the government to consider equity in exchange for any bailouts for large and medium enterprises as something that should be part of the fiscal weaponry that the government considers, depending upon the nature of each industry and the need at the time. But it is something the government needs to remain open to.

I also think the government will need to detail how Crown use of patents may be invoked, particularly for use for repurposed manufacturing businesses, to address shortages of essential goods impacted by disrupted supply chains. This really is a very important matter. Chapter 17 of the Patents Act allows exploitation of patent for government services in a crisis. These provisions were recently strengthened in a bill that received bipartisan support. These provisions include compensation for patent holders and an ability to override compensation if necessitated by an emergency. I have written to the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology inquiring as to whether the government had explored using this provision, particularly for urgent manufacturing of suppliers,
such as facial masks or goods in short supply due to disrupted supply chains. With a high degree of uncertainty about the supply of certain goods and a potentially drawn-out disruption to supply chains, Labor publicly wants to raise this issue as a matter that should be properly considered.

To meet the scale of this challenge, the government's response must be large enough, must be deployed more quickly than it has been to date and must be targeted enough to support livelihoods and prevent more job losses, business failures and a more serious economic downturn. Indeed, Labor are concerned that the federal government's latest response has not substantially addressed some gaps we identified in the original stimulus and has raised additional concerns which we will work through with the government, including dealing with these very important matters that I have just touched on. This unfolding economic crisis demands urgency, scale and coordination, but the government's initial—and subsequent—response has come too slowly and wasn't large enough.

As the Leader of the Opposition, the Labor leader, said at this dispatch box today: 'We will work closely with the government. We will not impede the passage of any legislation.' But the government, in turn, should work cooperatively with us and should consider the propositions that we are putting in this place to the government. They are put in good faith, and the government should consider them in that manner and should accept, in part or whole, some of those propositions, if they believe they are merit worthy—if they believe that they will add to and improve upon the package the government is considering.

These issues that go to strategic support for certain industries—really reconsidering the incentive to businesses to retain staff, because we believe that is a fundamental deficiency—are vital matters that the government would do well to consider in this debate and, hopefully, they will accept the amendments that we're moving today. It may well be the case they choose not to do that, but I'm afraid that if that is the case we may well be back here again quicker than we think.

As other speakers have said, as the Prime Minister and the opposition leader have said, we're in unprecedented times. I know every member in this place is dealing with the anxiety of their electorate, and I'm in no different a position to that. I want to thank, as others have done, the frontline staff in my electorate and, indeed, across the country: the remarkable health workers who go on and get to work each day to administer health for people who are at risk or, indeed, contagious. They are, of course, doing an heroic thing, and we should applaud them and, indeed, other workers, too: essential service workers; truck drivers, who are bringing wholesale goods to retailers; retail staff, who are sometimes dealing with angry and anxious shoppers, and having to do that and at the same time be worried about their own health; those who work in aged care—a very vulnerable cohort of people, as we know; and those teachers who look after our children. Again, I'd like to thank the teachers in my electorate in all of the schools. I'd like to personally thank Nicole Camilleri, who looks after my daughter when I come here to parliament in the evenings. She does that every week I'm in parliament, but I particularly want to thank her and her family for helping me personally.

These are difficult times and difficult measures. We ask the government to consider what we're putting sincerely. I think that if they do we'll have a better package that will protect the interests of this nation—its economic and health wellbeing.

**Mr CLARE** (Blaxland) (12:53): Australians are anxious. They're worried. Many are panicked and frightened. I see that in my own local area. I see it in the tussle over toilet paper at Coles and Woolworths. I see it in the fight that broke out at Bass Hill Woolworths only a week or so ago. But it's important to note that it's not all Australians. Most people that I run into at the shops are calm and kind and polite. They know what they have to do and they're doing it. What they need from us here is information: clear and consistent information. What they need from us, what they need from all of us, is leadership. I know that the government is under a lot of pressure. The decisions that they've already made and that they will make in the weeks ahead will determine how bad this crisis gets and how many Australians this virus kills.

When this is all over, we'll be judged not by how many people lose their jobs but by how many people lose their lives. That's the ultimate test that we all face. This economic package that we're debating here is important. If it works it will help to keep a lot of businesses on life support over the next few months, but there's something even more important here, and that's the number of Australians who end up in hospital on life support. The fact is that the faster this virus runs through the community, the more people will die. It's as simple as that. At the moment, the number of people infected is doubling every three days. If too many people get it too quickly, the hospital system will get overrun, we'll run out of respirators and other life support equipment and more people will die. That's why it's important to get the big calls right: the lives of Australians depend on us. It's important we as members of parliament support the government when they get those calls right, that we provide constructive help to the government on how to make the decisions that they've already made better and that we urge the government to take more action where we think it is needed. If we do that, we'll make a more important
contribution as an opposition than almost any opposition in the history of this parliament. And that's what we are doing every day.

That's what we're doing with this legislation. We're supporting it not because we think it is perfect but because it's urgent. Our main concern is that it doesn't go far enough and that it doesn't get the money to the people who need it quickly enough. The assistance for business isn't available for another month. The changes to deeming rates won't come into effect until May. There are payments for pensioners and veterans and others that won't arrive until the middle of July. It's too long. This crisis is happening now, and it requires the fierce urgency of now. So we urge the government to get this help to the people who need it faster.

There's also a bit of confusion over who gets access to this financial support. The finance minister said this morning that, if someone loses their job and their partner earns $70,000, they'll still get access to the jobseeker payment. That's not right. Under these laws, if your partner earns more than $1,858.50 a fortnight, or about $48,000 a year, you're not eligible for the payment. That's just one example of one of the problems that we think need to get fixed. There are lots of people who are going to lose their job. A lot of them work in pubs and clubs, and the decision made last night is going to force a lot of them into Centrelink queues. For example, at Bankstown Sports Club, in the heart of my electorate, 500 people were stood down today and another 120 have been made redundant. That doesn't count the 300 cleaners and restaurant staff and security workers who are contractors there. That's just one club. Multiply that right across the country. As I speak now, the line at Bankstown Centrelink is already around the corner and getting longer. I think about all of those people today.

I said last week that Coles put an ad online for 5,000 jobs and the next day they got applications from 36,000 people. That's in one day. They normally get 800 applications a day. That day they got 36,000. I can only imagine how many more applications they get today. All of these people are going to struggle to pay their bills, and we've got to give them all the support we can. That means money to put food on the table now—not tomorrow, not in another week, not in another month, but now.

It also includes passing laws to stop people who rent from being evicted now. I called for this last week. People who can't pay their rent because they've lost their job should not be evicted. That's the right thing to do. It also includes passing laws to stop people who rent from being evicted now. I called for this last week. People who can't pay their rent because they've lost their job should not be evicted. That's the right thing to do.

More also needs to be done to help specific industries. There are obvious ones that have been mentioned already in this debate, like tourism and hospitality, but there are also ones that are not so obvious. Let me give you one example: pathology services. It's counterintuitive. You'd think that pathology services across Australia would be flat out right now doing coronavirus testing, and they are. But they're not run off their feet. Why? Because people who usually go to the doctor to get a blood test aren't going. The only people who are going to the doctor at the moment are the people who think they have COVID-19. Last week, pathology businesses right across Australia were down 30 or 40 per cent. That risks two things: (1) people in Australia that are already sick will get sicker, and (2) these businesses—the pathology services that we're going to rely on in the months ahead to test and find out who has the coronavirus—risk going under unless they get help from the government. I know talks on this front are going on. It's important that they do, because we can't let our pathology services go under at any time, let alone now, with everything that's going on.

The Prime Minister describes this as a war and he's right. It is a war; it's a world war. We're fighting an invisible army marching relentlessly across the globe. Every country will be affected, every country will be infected, and after it is all over there'll be two types of countries: the quick and the dead. The faster countries react, the fewer the citizens who will die. I worry that we're not acting quickly enough: that we weren't quick enough to shut down our borders, to test people getting off planes and cruise ships, and to stop large gatherings of people; that we haven't set up the emergency fever clinics quickly enough; and that we haven't had enough clear information on TV, in every ad break, quickly enough. I hope I'm wrong about all of that but, ultimately, history will be the judge. In the meantime, I want to thank the people who are really on the front line of this—the doctors and nurses, the scientists, the specialists, and all of the allied health workers—who can see this invisible wave coming at them and are getting ready for it. They are burdened with one of most important tasks in the history of this country. What they do in the next few months, more than anything that we do here, will determine how many lives we save. Knowing that, I want to thank them now and implore them, when it gets hard, when it gets really hard, to keep going.

I also want to thank the people who work in our schools, the people who work in our aged-care centres, the people who work with disabled Australians, and the people who help homeless Australians—people who don't have a home to self-isolate in—delivering food to people in need. Many of them are volunteers, like my friend...
Hilton Harmer. He has been a volunteer with the Salvation Army for over 40 or 50 years. He's in his 80s now and his health is not the best, but he's out there every day providing to the underprivileged—providing food, beds, furniture, clothing and help where it's needed. He told me that this isn't going to stop him, that he's not going to give up. All of these people are on the front line too. So are the workers at Woolies and Coles, at Bass Hill and Chullora and in supermarkets right across the country. They deserve our thanks today and every day, and they deserve our kindness and our calmness. Ultimately, that's what will get us through this: washing our hands, keeping our distance from each other, listening to what the people with the stethoscopes around their neck tell us to do, and being kind to each other and being our best selves here in this place and right across the country.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Whitlam) (13:04): I should start by saying that I wish to move an amendment that has been circulated in my name. I move in respect of the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020:

That the following words be added after paragraph (7):

"(8)(a) every Australian deserves a dignified retirement;
(b) Australians are proud of our world-class superannuation system;
(c) drawing down on superannuation when the market is at historic lows will have negative implications for most Australians, and should only be an option of last resort; and
(d) the administrative arrangements specified in Schedule 13 of the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 will not ensure that Australians in genuine hardship receive prompt payment from their superannuation fund;
(9) calls on the Government to:
(a) ensure that ordinary Australians have access to the right information and advice in times of hardship by increasing funding for financial counselling and the Centrelink Financial Information Service; and
(b) closely monitor the financial advice industry to ensure that early release claimants are not provided with inaccurate advice; and
(10) asks the Government to:
(a) table a letter from the Chair of the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, certifying that the implementation of Schedule 13 will have no systemic impacts on the superannuation system; and
(b) consult with industry, unions, and representatives of other political parties before the implementation of the measures in Schedule 13, noting the potentially significant, negative impact on the retirement outcomes of ordinary Australians".

The Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020—is about money. It's about facilitating payments, but it's about much more than that. We come here today in absolutely extraordinary circumstances. It's about how we respond as a government on behalf of the people that we represent to face the greatest challenge that any of us have experienced in our lifetime. It's about how we as a community respond to an existential threat, a disease that was discovered less than six months ago but has now spread to every continent.

As I came into the chamber today, I checked the number of people who had been infected. In Australia, the number today stands at 1,550, growing at about 22 per cent a day. Globally, it is 335,972. Tragically, seven Australians have already lost their lives from this terrible disease. Globally, in excess of 14,500 people have lost their lives, with that number growing by multiple thousands every day. This is real. If nothing changes, if that growth rate continues, by the time New South Wales schoolchildren are scheduled to go on holidays there will be 55,000 infections. I just want to repeat that: we are at 1,550 today, but by the time New South Wales schoolchildren are scheduled to go on holidays, if we keep growing at the same rate, it will be around 55,000. By the time they come back off holidays, there will be in excess of two million infections, if we continue to grow at the same rate.

Business as usual is not good enough. Despite the ubiquity of the disease, the response globally and even locally has been anything but ubiquitous. I have to say some countries have been better prepared in this than others. Those who had the more recent experience of responding to the SARS epidemic were well briefed and well prepared on the steps that they needed to take. They appear to have had a better response with their public health initiatives. Others have been slower to move. History may prove me wrong on this, as things are moving very, very rapidly, but it appears the drastic response in the Chinese province of Hubei has been the most successful in slowing down the spread of the epidemic. It sends a very clear message to us as policymakers about the sorts of responses that are going to be necessary. If I leave one message on behalf of the people that I represent in this parliament today, it is that we have to move faster. Business as usual is not going to cut it.

I want to give a shout-out to the locals who are already hurting. Thousands and thousands of people throughout the Illawarra are losing their jobs, losing their businesses and losing their livelihoods. To you today, I say: I acknowledge your pain. We can't do everything to ameliorate that, but it behoves us to do everything that is possible.
I want to acknowledge the people who are already on the front line fighting in our communities in the first wave of this response: the health workers, the doctors, the nurses and the clinicians who are on the front line in some of the most difficult positions, putting themselves at risk as they help to save lives in our communities. They need our support and they need our acknowledgement. They certainly do not need our hostility. We should be doing everything we can to ensure that they have all of the tools, all of the resources and all of the funding that are going to be necessary over the very difficult months ahead.

I turn to the matters considered in the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020. The minister has described the bill as a stimulus. It's not. It's about maintenance, and I mean no criticism of the minister or the government when I make this observation. It's not about stimulus; it's about maintenance—about maintaining the vestiges of the economy and the community until a health recovery occurs. A part of the problem is that, in most respects, you've got a health policy and an economic policy pulling in different directions. Let me explain. The health imperative—social isolation and social distancing—of its necessity requires people to stay at home and reduce the amount of contact that they have with others. When you compare that to the traditional economic response in times of an economic downturn, it's almost the very opposite: we try to lift aggregate demand by providing households, consumers and businesses with money and encouraging them to get out there and spend it.

Clearly, an economic response which is built around getting out there and spending it is not really going to work when the health response is about telling people, 'Actually, we need you to stay indoors; we need you to stay at home; and we need you to reduce the contact that you're having with other people.' Before others jump to contradict, I know that there is lots of economic activity that doesn't involve direct face-to-face contact with others. But so much of our economy, particularly our services economy, does. So those people who are in the front line of the services economy—people in the hospitality industry, in the services industry, and in health and personal care—are going to do it really hard over the coming months, and they deserve every bit of support that we can give them.

It also means that we have to be very careful about the economic policies that we deploy to fight the economic consequences of what is a health pandemic. It's why our economic policies need to be well thought through. If they are, they will work, and we will get to the other side of this thing. We will be able to rebuild our economy and rebuild our livelihoods and put communities, businesses and households back together again. But, if they aren't well crafted, they'll have the opposite effect.

I want to turn my attention to schedule 3 of the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020. Schedule 3 proposes to amend the SIS Act, amongst other instruments, to allow the early cash-out of superannuation on the grounds of hardship. The law already allows for the cash-out of superannuation on the ground of hardship. These amendments will expand those provisions. I want to make it quite clear that Labor understands the tough positions that many households are in. But the simple fact of the matter is that, in normal times, cashing out your superannuation is an incredibly bad decision. That's why the best advice should be available to households as they make their tough decisions on these new arrangements.

For most fund members in most circumstances it is not in their financial interest to do this. For example, as a general rule, an employee on average wages their late 20s who withdraws $20,000 from their superannuation account will be somewhere between $80,000 and $100,000 worse off over their lifetime as a result of that one decision—$20,000 today; $80,000 to $100,000 worse off in their retirement accounts. In the first 10 minutes of the stock market opening today, the Australian Stock Exchange, the ASX 200, lost eight per cent in value. It's lost 38 per cent in value since the coronavirus began to emerge as an economic issue at the end of February—38 per cent. I make this point because it is hard to think of a worse time in the last 30 years, since occupational superannuation has existed, for a fund member to draw money out of their account. It's 38 per cent down since the end of February. If we draw money out now as an individual or as collectives, we are crystallising that loss. I know households are struggling with a lot of difficult decisions: this is one of them.

Can I also say, as a result of legislation that the government passed through this parliament a few months ago which changes the life insurance arrangement in superannuation funds, if fund members draw their account down below $6,000 or they remain inactive, as many will, for more than six months they will lose their life insurance. I wage life insurance is not something that most Australians were thinking about two months ago, but I'm quite certain that today it is something that they ought to be thinking about.

We're also concerned about the behaviour of unscrupulous financial advisers. As late as December last year, the Australian tax office was warning about scheme promoters that promise to allow you to withdraw your superannuation early. That was in December last year. We're deeply concerned that this becomes another avenue for unscrupulous advisers—an absolute minority, but, by God, that minority can do a lot of damage in a short period of time. We call on the government and the regulators to ensure that this does not occur. Unscrupulous
advisers should not be capitalising on the anxiety and the risky positions that vulnerable Australians are in to earn fees off early cash-out schemes. That is untenable.

Of course there is also a community and a collective risk in this. I've talked about the state of the stock market. The government assumes that 1.65 million Australians will seek access to this scheme: $7,800 in the first year and $8,500 in year 2. We are asking the government to give us weekly reports on the access to this scheme because it will only take a small variance on those assumptions to have a massive effect not just on the individuals, not just on the administrative capacity of the funds and the government bodies administering it but the liquidity positions of funds as well. We need accurate and updated information, all the more because parliament is unlikely to be sitting during the very time when there is a rush on these applications being made.

The only thing worse than a bad idea is a bad idea implemented badly. As we came into the chamber this morning, we learnt that the myGov portal had crashed as thousands and thousands of Australians had rushed online, having lost their job, to make an application for unemployment benefits. Most members in this place would not be aware that the myGov portal is the gateway through which people are going to exercise the provisions of the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020. They don't apply to their fund; they apply through myGov. MyGov hands that application onto the ATO who processes it and then sends it on to the fund as a request for payment. There are so many links in this chain that can go wrong, and that most likely will go wrong, that we urge the government to rethink some of these arrangements. At the very least, they should be staffing the ATO to ensure that they can process these claims properly and they should be ensuring their systems have the rigour.

In addition to that, the funds that are going to have the obligation to pay the fund member once authorised by the ATO do not have the information that is going to be required. The ATO is going to be saying to the fund: 'Make this payment into this member's bank account.' But the funds don't have the member's bank account. This can take weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks to resolve. That's why Labor is calling on the government to look in good faith at the amendments that we are putting before the House today. They are designed to take some of the rough edges off something that we say is a bad idea. But the only thing worse than a bad idea is a bad idea poorly implemented. Unless these issues are dealt with—the issues around financial advice, the issues around information available to the fund and the administration of this—many Australians will suffer. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Gosling: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The amendment is seconded. The original question was that these bills be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Rankin moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to submitting other words. The honourable member for Watson moved an amendment to that amendment adding words. The honourable member for Whitlam has now moved as an amendment to that amendment that certain other words be added. The question now is that the amendment moved by the honourable member for Whitlam to the amendment moved by the member for Watson be agreed to.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong) (13:20): I rise to speak in favour of the amendments and to bring a couple of perspectives from my particular portfolio areas to the coronavirus challenge which Australia faces. But, first of all, going to the discussion about superannuation and accessing that, I think this is a bad idea. I get that people are doing it hard. There are hardship provisions currently available under the law. But I think that encouraging the tackling and the use of the superannuation when it's at the bottom of the market and when people will have no chance to replace what they take out of their superannuation is robbing the future to pay for the present when there are other mechanisms available to help people experiencing income shortage, which can be done directly from the government. The raiding of superannuation, I feel, is an unwise measure. But my concern about that shouldn't therefore mean that we oppose the whole of the legislation, because there is more good in the proposals than there is bad, but the amendment is important.

Indeed talking about how we support Australians in this time of the coronavirus, the coming months will tell us what sort of people we are and what sort of nation we are. One of the things which will define this response, the parliament's response and the nation's response, is how we treat those most in need. Amongst those most in need I speak of are people living with disability and their carers. Perhaps, for once, people with disability will be the first in the queue. There is no doubt in my mind that disability services in this pandemic are essential services.

In an ordinary time, the bravery and courage of people with disability and their carers is something that we're all witness to. It can be the patience and endurance of an excellent brain trapped in a body contorted by muscular dystrophy. It can be the tenacity of a mother loving her son with a profound disability, exhausted but sending emails in the middle of the night trying to get the best equipment and services for her precious child. I think that this quiet heroism will be an example to us all as many of us are asked to make comparatively small sacrifices in
the months ahead. We cannot forget, therefore, the most vulnerable, their carers and loved ones. Given that the coronavirus is so dangerous and lethal to older people, it's natural that our focus should be, as it is, on the elderly and the aged-care sector, but we cannot forget people with disability. The international media coverage of the coronavirus has been strangely lacking in its coverage of people with disability. It is because people with disability and their carers all too often are simply invisible, are just simply forgotten. This is why this nation, in their time of need, should be there with our help and our protection.

Specifically, the government has pledged virus tests for all aged-care workers, which is excellent. The same must be made available for all disability workers. If a disability worker in the only service in a mid-sized regional town is all of a sudden unable, because of a COVID-19 diagnosis, to attend, this means that the whole service could be shut down and many, many of our fellow Australians at home could be isolated with no carer to come. So the virus tests should be made available for all disability workers. The reason for saying this, other than the obvious, is that this virus is, at its heart, a public health emergency. It is then an economic problem, but, at its heart, we must treat this as a public health emergency. Therefore, tests for disability care workers should not be viewed as a nice idea but optional. It is an essential service and should be mandatory.

The second immediate proposal to make sure Australians with disability and their families can cope with the coronavirus is to maintain cash flow for all the businesses providing disability services. There are 13,000 disability services, roughly, providing services to 315,000 people on the NDIS and many Australians with a disability who don't qualify for the NDIS. Many of them were doing it hard before the coronavirus arrived on our shores; they need cash flow so they don't collapse. We've learnt that already many providers are waiting on the payment of invoices in the millions of dollars because the NDIA has a backlog, which the CEO has conceded is up to 15,000 invoices. This lack of cash flow will spell market failure in regional, remote and, indeed, suburban services, especially where there's only one provider. We cannot have people with disabilities stranded without services. Furthermore, on this second point about cash flow for disability organisations, it is good that the government has said NDIS plans can go for 24 months, but they should be rolled over. NDIS officials will not be attending meetings, but we shouldn't be making the participants leap through hoops to get reports and prepare. We should be rolling over the packages except where the participant is seeking a variation.

The third thing we need to do is have a proper workforce plan for when people with disability, their individual carers and disability workers have to self-isolate. We cannot have the situation—and this concerns me greatly—where carers can't attend and there are people in their homes with no-one to see to them. Leaving people stranded, unaided, in their own homes will be a disaster. If these people have to go into the hospital system, it will further crowd and complicate the delivery of hospital services. To that end, we need to support the workforce on an ongoing basis. When an NDIS plan has a cancellation from the participant, the funding should still be there to keep the worker in place.

The fourth of the immediate issues is that it's now time to consider creating an army reserve of carers, to be filled by displaced workers swung in from other industries. If we can teach people displaced from other industries the basics of infection control, we can have a surge workforce which will protect people. When someone with a disability has to go to a hospital, the process will be further complicated. Let's draft some of the people who are displaced from other industries and give them the basics so that we can have a surge workforce in disability.

These are four propositions which are fundamental: workforce, cash flow, creating an army reserve of extra workers and, of course, making sure that at all times we have tests for disability carers. But there is a further challenge which disability providers are alerting me to. They tell me of their struggle to get disability related equipment, such as continence pads, catheters and equipment needed for PEG feeding. When relatively healthy people panic buy ventolin, this has a massive flow-on effect on those who live with cystic fibrosis and other disabilities. We desperately need to gather all available equipment for people with disability and PPE—personal protective equipment, such as face masks—for the disability carers who work with them. I've been inundated with calls from people in regional Queensland, right up and down the east coast and in Western Australia concerned that people working with people with disabilities cannot get basic PPE. Masks, gloves and sanitiser need to be distributed to registered and non-registered NDIS providers and people with disability as soon as possible to prevent transmission amongst vulnerable individuals so that our hospitals do not become overwhelmed or forced to look after people with complex needs, which they don't really have the capacity to do. It is, indeed, this shortage of PPE and medical equipment which has exposed a vulnerability in an otherwise great society like Australia's.

We have at least six months left to travel through the clear and present danger presented by the coronavirus. I've got no doubt that during this crisis we will look after each other; we will listen to the better angels of our nature. We certainly hear the stories of hoarding, but there are thousands of stories of kindness, of a helping hand being extended. We will listen to the better angels of our nature; of this I am confident. We will, as Labor has
always advocated, act in the interests of the group to make sure that no-one is left behind. We will, to a large extent, have to retreat to our homes. We will have to make some of the necessary sacrifices to slow down the rate of infection. After this storm has passed, we will re-emerge. We will rebuild our businesses, our social lives, our community and our economy. We will hopefully learn the lessons of this crisis so that people with disability and older Australians—indeed, all Australians—don't have to face this again, not just lessons of a medical sense but lessons across our society.

We are a trading nation, advanced in the world, with a good population size and diversified industries. Our people are dexterous, ingenious and inventive. We're an island nation and our fate should be in our own hands—the hands of regular, sensible Australians. But the virus has made it painfully clear to me and thousands of Australians just how clearly we are exposed when we act as a colonial branch office of a global supply chain instead of as an independent economic nation. It is painfully clear now that Australia needs to make its own face masks at scale, its own ventilators at scale and its own guarantees of pharmaceutical access at scale. Most ventilators used in Australian hospitals are imported from Germany, Switzerland, Sweden and North America, with smaller suppliers located in China and South Korea. Whatever the international fantasies which have been hoarded by pursuers and advocates of particular ideological views, when the chips are down we organise ourselves as nations.

This virus has shown that we need sovereign capability. For example, nations all around the world are discovering that they do not have enough ventilators to cope with coronavirus. They do not have enough and there are not enough to buy. The story of Italy ordering 4,000 ventilators last month and having 400 ventilators to purchase highlights the vulnerability which is not just a feature of Italy but a feature of nations. We intuitively know we need sovereign capability in relation to our defence forces. I've spoken before of our need for sovereign capability in relation to energy sources and fuel supplies. There are obvious virtues in having sovereign capability when it comes to steel and areas of manufacturing. But, to this list of sovereign capability, we are learning we need to have sovereign capability in medical equipment and medical supplies. What we now require is a form of wartime-like mobilisation to build our own equipment. I, like many members of this House, am being inundated with offers from manufacturers saying: 'We have got the people. We have the skills. We have the desire, the ingenuity and the knowledge to build equipment.'

Coronavirus is inherently an antisocial disease. It forces us not to congregate en masse, not to cluster together and not to go to concerts or football. Old industries, however, have gone in Australia. Our new economy is built around things that cannot be outsourced or automated—in other words, service industries. What we need to do now is congregate around our manufacturing. This global supply chain situation means that nations will insert themselves to protect their own interests. Coronavirus, which attacks people's lungs, needs ventilators and computerised bedside machines, which can cost as much as $50,000. These are complex pieces of machinery and cannot be made simply. They are made up of hundreds of smaller parts produced by companies all over the world. These ventilators will keep alive people who will otherwise not survive.

It takes a while to move to the start of production that I'm talking about, but the lesson for me in all of this is that this nation should be capable of making personal protective equipment and medical equipment. We need to convert some of our factories from existing work to coronavirus needs. We need to allocate scarce materials and priorities in the distribution of materials and services to build medical equipment. I have no doubt, as others have said, that we will see it through together. Our manufacturers have ingenuity, dexterity and resourcefulness. There will not be just one point of view on how to solve the problems we face.

We have a common goal: this is a health emergency, and keeping people alive is our fundamental mission. There will be many approaches. There will be overlapping considerations and much shared values. But, along with making sure that people with disability are not invisible, along with making sure that our frontline carers have personal protective equipment, along with making sure that we have cash flow to this sector, along with making sure that packages of support are available and that the usual bureaucratic red tape is dispensed with in the national interest, along with making sure that we have a surge workforce and an army reserve of carers distributed from other industries, we must accelerate production. Some of the premiers and leaders have used the language of war. All I would say is that we need to have mobilisation to get our factories churning out more ventilators, masks and PPE. We need to make sure we're not inadvertently exporting health supplies which our own people require.

We can get through this. We will rebuild. What we are seeing is what happens when a virulently antisocial disease is let loose on a social services based economy. We are starting to see now how logical solutions will also have to be nation based and home grown. If we do everything we can in the face of this challenge; if we can maintain the physical distance while being there in spirit and on the phone for those who need us; if we can take the drastic measures now, I predict that we will be talking about getting our manufacturers to tool up and create sovereign capability in our health supplies going forward. If we know that's what we have to do, then the sooner
we do it, the better we serve the people of our nation and the most vulnerable, who depend on us most particularly.

**Mr FITZGIBBON** (Hunter) (13:35): This is an historic and poignant day for our national parliament. In my 24 years here I've never seen anything like it. The seating arrangements and the sanitiser on the bar table in themselves indicate that something very unusual is happening here. I think of the apology to the Stolen Generations. I think of the day we sat on a Saturday to complete the necessary Wik legislation. They were big occasions, but even those momentous events cannot match what we are doing here today. It is highly unusual.

When I was appointed defence minister our Australian Defence Force was at a very high level of operational tempo. The toughest part of the job is the weight of responsibility it brings: talking to the parents of fallen soldiers and attending ramp ceremonies and, of course, funerals. They are things that really weigh upon you when you carry that responsibility. Today, as a member of the opposition, I feel that weight of responsibility again. It might sound a little unusual, because those of us on this side face the reality that we don't have a lot of influence over the events that are taking place across our nation as we speak. But I do feel that responsibility—absolutely. I suppose it's the spirit of Westminster coming into its own, as we all try so hard to reach across the table and work as one.

People are dying, and more Australians will die. Too many are getting sick. Our economy is drifting into a coma. People are losing their jobs as we speak—many, many people. Sadly, we are teetering on the brink of civil unrest. I hope not, but we've seen signs of it. We've seen lots of irrational behaviour, and I think we can expect more if we as a parliament don't get this right.

The opposition, as the Leader of the Opposition and others indicated, will be supporting this package, but we do so through somewhat gritted teeth, for three reasons. First, we were not afforded the same courtesy more than 10 years ago during the global financial crisis. That was a very big event, not as big as the event we're dealing with today, but very, very big indeed. That's a matter of great regret for me and probably, I hope, great regret for the parliament more generally.

Second, the measures are late—too late for some. Some businesses won't survive this crisis because this assistance has come too late. You'll recall, Mr Deputy Speaker Hogan, that when needles were found in strawberries—a serious matter in itself—the government passed legislation if not the same day as the revelations then the second day. It was certainly very, very quickly. Yet here we are, maybe eight weeks on from the revelation of this virus being present in Australia, and we're only just now dealing with measures to support the economy and to support the people who rely upon our economy. It's been too slow, and that's what Australians are saying.

The third point is: the package isn't perfect. It's not the package the Labor Party would be delivering in opposition. There are many flaws. Many have spoken already about superannuation issues. I won't revisit them. Suffice to say I didn't believe I'd ever be standing in this place supporting an arrangement which allowed people to access their superannuation early. It's been suggested many, many times before. We've had parliamentary inquiries into this, and thankfully all the propositions that have gone before this one have been rejected. But here we are, and it just demonstrates again how extraordinary these circumstances are.

I'm really concerned about the spousal income test for those who'll be looking for support under the new jobseeker allowance, or the rebadged allowance. This is a very big mistake, and it has to be fixed. Very few people are losing their jobs through no fault of their own are going to be successful in securing the jobseeker allowance if their modest spousal income is taken into account. It just won't happen. The hairdresser working casually who now loses her job but has a husband earning a modest income will not be able to access the support unless this matter is addressed, and it must be addressed. We regret the fact that so many of the initiatives won't come into force for many months to come. It will be too late for many; you can be sure about that.

I also regret the confusion and anxiety in our communities caused by poor leadership, slow decision-making and poor communication. No wonder people are doing irrational things. Poor and inconsistent messaging has caused anxiety amongst teachers and parents alike in particular. The small-business operators I spoke to today still don't know where they stand, still don't know what they are allowed to do and not allowed to do. It's not good enough. It simply isn't good enough. It makes it hard for members on this side in particular who know the importance of bipartisanship at this dark time in our nation's history. We understand the importance of bipartisanship, but the confusion and inadequacies of this package and the government's messaging are making it challenging to maintain bipartisanship. But we remain determined to deliver it, and we'll also continue to provide constructive criticism where we believe it is warranted. Australia needs us all working as one right now.

I won't go into all the details of the bill, because the opposition leader, the shadow Treasurer and others have spoken much of them and I know my time is limited. But I will say a couple of things very quickly. Anyone who believes the small-business measures—or the business measures more generally—are going to save all of our
businesses is an optimist. They won't. I'm not saying they're not sufficiently generous in their funding, but they won't. This is going to be very, very tough for our small-business community.

I'd rather use my limited time to say a few things about rural and regional Australia. First, I'm concerned people living in rural and regional Australia aren't taking COVID-19 sufficiently seriously. Capital cities have been the epicentre of the virus, and somehow we've been shielded, in relative terms at least. The non-handshake is a bit of a joke still for country people, but it's no joke. This virus is as deadly for those of us living in rural and regional Australia as it is for our city cousins, and we need to take it very, very seriously.

Our regions provide our food and power. Governments will need to ensure our coal and power generation sectors are supported, as all essential services will need to be. That doesn't just mean keeping them running; it's also about making sure they have the support they need, including measures to maintain their workforces. I congratulate both of those sectors because both of them have put protocols very quickly in place.

Our food sector will need support too, with measures specific to it. I've been overwhelmed by appeals from various players in the food and fibre sectors who don't feel they're getting the information or the support they need, and we need to act quickly. In the Hunter we are a visitor economy in part. Our wine country is doing it tough. Our visitor economy is doing it tough. They are in trouble and will need more help.

In relation to our pubs and clubs everywhere, we understand the decision, but this is a crisis for our pubs and our clubs. These are not all wealthy businessmen or businesswomen. Often these are small family hotels, and we've just pulled the rug out from under them. They will need help. Think about all the support that clubs in particular give in our communities in rural and regional Australia. Rural and regional Australia survives on the support of our clubs. The clubs are our venues for most community events, and they've closed their doors. That's going to cause big problems for many not-for-profit organisations in our communities and for our community more generally.

I'm concerned about the lack of representation for rural and regional Australia in the national cabinet. I might stand corrected, but I understand the Deputy Prime Minister is not sitting in the cabinet. I haven't seen him there. I think that's a mistake. I've got respect for the Deputy Prime Minister. We need someone who breathes and lives rural and regional Australia at the decision-making table. It seems to me the Deputy Prime Minister is the obvious person, and I appeal to the Prime Minister to consider that. Rural and regional Australia is a different place, and it needs to be at that table.

I believe our local councils could be resourced better to allow them to be the real enablers in rural and regional communities. They have the skills, the people, the data and the facilities. They just need the resourcing, and the government should consider giving it to them.

I close by thanking our doctors and other health professionals, our first responders, our teachers and all of those people who are under enormous pressure as a result of this crisis—and there are many of them. We're all in this together, so let's take care of one another and let's get to the other side of this crisis in relatively good shape.

Mr Giles (Scullin) (13:47): All Australians are facing the consequences of COVID-19. This is a health emergency, and it is so much more than a health emergency. Its consequences are vast, and so too are the responsibilities of all of us in this place. As with all of us who have the opportunity to contribute to this debate, the weight of that responsibility weighs very heavily on my shoulders.

In making a very brief contribution to the debate on these important measures in the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 and related bills, I'll try to confine myself to those matters that are most essential, but I want to make clear that, in supporting the thrust of the measures contained in these bills and the government's proposals, I echo the concerns of my colleagues—the Leader of the Labor Party, the shadow Treasurer and the shadow minister for health in particular—in a couple of critical respects—firstly, in terms of the delay. I think it would have been better to have brought this place back last week so that we could have brought forward action then. Indeed, that concern goes to some of the substantive measures which are contained in these bills. Action that can take place today should take place today, not in the future. We see the evidence of that all around us in the communities we represent and in the media as well. I have particular concerns, obviously, about superannuation, and I put those on the record. I support the amendment moved by the member for Rankin, the shadow Treasurer, and the amendments to that which have been moved by the member for Whitlam and the member for Watson.

In making my personal remarks, can I say this: we all need to acknowledge our shared responsibility to protect our health and the health of our communities, particularly the elderly and those most vulnerable. The spread of this virus is forcing us all to change our ways and for many Australians, including many I represent, this is incredibly hard—I get that. But we simply must act now, not least to ensure that our health system and the wonderful people who work in it can do their jobs.
As I stand here, people are losing their jobs. Businesses and entire sectors of our economy are facing shutdown and, at best, periods of prolonged uncertainty. The long lines at Centrelink in Epping and Scullin and right around our country conjure images of the Great Depression. As I said, this is a health crisis but it's also having a dramatic effect on our society and on all of our livelihoods. We can be doing more to support people and we should be doing more. We should be doing this now, not in a month's time or later, so I urge the government and all members of it to give consideration to any immediate one-off payment that can be made in a simple fashion, because people can't wait to go through burdensome processes to get support from Centrelink. We shouldn't be forcing people to congregate around Centrelink offices. We shouldn't be exposing the hardworking staff in those offices.

I acknowledge the announcement today about additional support but, in any event, we shouldn't be forcing those staff into the challenges and indeed the threats they have been facing in this environment. Centrelink is clearly overwhelmed in my electorate today. My thoughts and my empathy are with the hardworking staff there for the challenges they are facing and, indeed, for those anxious people trying to get support they so desperately need in circumstances of which no-one could have conceived. This is no time for half measures. Australians need support now. There's not a minute to waste.

I'm going to touch briefly on my responsibilities as a member of the Labor shadow ministry. At this time, we need to think about Australia's multicultural communities. Twenty-one per cent of Australians speak a language other than English at home, yet the public information so far provided by the government has not been readily translated into enough other languages. I have raised this matter with the acting minister, but action has not been fast enough to enable many Australians, particularly older Australians from CALD backgrounds, to take steps to protect themselves and to protect their communities. This needs to improve and it needs to improve fast. I'd urge members to have a look at the Victorian DHHS website, which shows a more comprehensive approach to providing this information. This is a matter of some urgency. I urge government members, particularly those who do represent multicultural communities, to act to enable people in those communities to do the right thing by themselves and by those around them.

We can't ignore in this debate the ugly presence of racism. Racism did not begin with the coronavirus but it raises new challenges in this context. We've seen the awful incidence early on in this journey of racism directed at Chinese Australians and Asian Australians more generally. It continues to undermine our efforts to bring people together in our shared endeavours to keep us safe and hold our society and our economy together as well, as does its general corrosive effect. We need to send a clear signal in this place that there is no tolerance for racism in Australia and that we all stand together.

I also want to talk about the nearly two million people in Australia currently on temporary visas of various types and make the obvious point that COVID-19 does not recognise different visa statuses. We need to all be protected through this time. In this, I recognise the many New Zealanders who call Australia home, who have made their home in Australia over the last decade-and-a-half or so in particular. We can't and we won't forget you in this crisis. In Labor, we understand that you need support, just as we know you will also play your roles in keeping our country safe from this virus and its consequences. I note that temporary migrants also account for five per cent of general practitioners and resident medical officers in Australia and close to 10 per cent of the nursing support and personal care workforce. These are people who are doing extraordinarily important work at risk to themselves, in difficult circumstances. They deserve us as a society to also recognise the challenges that they are facing. We can't forget also about the people in our country who have sought asylum here, who are some of the most vulnerable in our community. We have to recognise their interest in being supported and the wonderful organisations that are supporting them as well as the critical importance of supporting them in the interests of all of our public health needs. In this crisis, at this time, we are all in this together. It is that simple.

More generally, I want to briefly touch on my responsibility as our spokesperson for cities. Cities are wonderful machines that bring people together. Cities are devices for connection. That is being fundamentally challenged right now, but, as we push—as we must—for social distancing generally and social isolation where necessary, we cannot allow our friends and neighbours to become isolated. I've spoken often in this place about loneliness and the challenge it presents to our society—the damage it does to individuals and the damage it does to all of us. It's something that we need to think harder about right now. We need to think differently about how we maintain connections and how we maintain a sense of community through these challenging times. I think it's a responsibility for all of us in this place to lead by example as well as by our words, because the stakes couldn't be higher.

I reflect, as others have done, on my deep appreciation of and the need for greater support for those who are at the very front line of this crisis: our healthcare workers. I'm in awe of the work that they do at the Northern Hospital and at general practices and, I'm sure, right around our country. We need to ensure that they get the
support they need through flattening the curve and, more generally, the individual support they need to keep doing the work they are doing for all of us.

The stakes couldn't be higher. This is literally a matter of life and death for thousands, if not tens of thousands, of Australians today. As Daniel Andrews, the Premier of Victoria, said this morning:

If we have a situation where this virus fundamentally gets away from us, we will have thousands of people who will only survive if they can breathe with the assistance of a machine and we will not have enough machines, nurses and doctors to provide that care.

That is why taking such drastic action to shut down and lock down entire sections of our economy and our society are necessary, though difficult. And that is why we have to be absolutely clear about this imperative now and going forward.

We need to protect Australians from this virus. We also need to protect their livelihoods. That is why my colleagues have been so clear in setting out our concern about the lack of a connection between important stimulus measures and the protection of income and work. These are things which have been attended to elsewhere. I urge government members to think about how they can be done here. This is about protecting our society as well as individuals' incomes and individuals' capacity to look after themselves and their communities. This isn't a time for panic. It's a time for action and, where we're not ready for action, for preparation. It is a time for leadership, for resolution and for clarity, fundamentally, recognising the great anxiety and confusion that there is abroad in all of our communities.

Let's think again about the small things we can all do and the impact doing the right thing can have if we all wash our hands regularly, if we all not only practise social distancing but are clear to Australians—in English and in appropriate languages—on what social distancing means, if we can tell people to literally avoid all non-essential contact with others outside of our homes and if we can stay at home and only get groceries once a week. If we can be clear in giving instructions, Prime Minister, I would personally be very grateful. I'm sure all of us and the communities we represent will be grateful. If we don't gather in large groups, then it is up to all of us to do the right thing. It is for all of us who are in this place and have the privilege to lead to give clear, consistent and constructive leadership.

To the people whom I represent in the Scullin electorate, let me be clear: through this time I will keep working for you, although the nature of that work will change. I will be doing my best to keep all of you informed and engaged. I'm still listening to you, and my staff will find ways to work for you and to reflect your concerns and your needs. We can get through this if we come together, work together and always look out for each other.

Debate interrupted.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:00): I inform the House that the Minister for Home Affairs will be absent from question time today and that the Attorney-General will answer questions on his behalf as well as on behalf of the Minister for Defence and on behalf of the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs. The Minister for Population, Cities and Urban infrastructure will be absent from question time today, and the Deputy Prime Minister will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Energy and Emissions Reduction will be absent from question time today, and the Treasurer will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Indigenous Australians will be absent from question time today, and the Minister for Health will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for International Development and the Pacific and Assistant Defence Minister will be absent from question time today, and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government will be absent from question time today, and the minister for communications will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

COVID-19

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm that the number of COVID-19 cases in Australia is doubling every three days and if this continues the pressure on our health system will become enormous? Does the Prime Minister agree that our national objective must be to bring this outbreak under control, as South Korea has done?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:01): I can confirm that as I came into question time today there were 1,609 confirmed cases in Australia; sadly, there have been seven deaths; and 91 persons have recovered from the coronavirus. I can confirm that the rate of escalation of those cases has been concerning, and that has been a keen focus of the AHPPC, the panel of medical experts who are reviewing
this issue, as they have been every day since late January, and are providing consistent advice about the measures that need to be taken not just by the federal government but by state governments as well. Those governments have been taking those actions, as has the Commonwealth government.

Earlier today I had a leadership meeting with the Prime Minister of Singapore, the annual leaders' dialogue between Singapore and Australia. That was done, under these unusual circumstances, by telepresence. At that we signed the Digital Economy Agreement. I discussed with the Prime Minister of Singapore, particularly, a lot of the measures that they have been putting in place. The Leader of the Opposition made reference to the work that has been done in South Korea. The work that has been done in Singapore has been a particular guide to the way that the Australian government, as well as the states and territories, have been looking to put measures in place. Those measures in Singapore include the fact that schools remain open in Singapore. Importantly, we had a discussion about how it was so important to ensure that—

Mr Albanese: Temperature testing in Singapore.

Mr MORRISON: No, I understand what the position is in Singapore. In Singapore, they have put a range of measures in place that mirror the sorts of initiatives that Australia is seeking to put in place around the country. Our societies are different. Our regulatory systems are different. It is very difficult to compare between countries. The datasets between countries are very different. But I do know that Australia's rate of testing is one of the highest in the world—the number of tests that we have undertaken—and we also have the lowest rate of positive testing in the world. So we have a very significant challenge. It is our goal, as both the Australian government and the state and territory governments, to ensure that we limit the spread of the virus through all the measures that are available to us and to do so on the basis of the expert medical advice.

COVID-19

Mrs McIntosh (Lindsay) (14:04): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline to the House how the Commonwealth government is working to protect the health and wellbeing of Australians and their livelihoods from the coronavirus global pandemic crisis and how the Commonwealth government is ensuring that Australia is in the best possible position to emerge from this crisis?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:04): I thank the member for Lindsay for her question. In relation to her last statement, Australia has gone into this crisis—both a health crisis and an economic crisis—with a very strong health system and with state and territory governments and a Commonwealth government that have balance sheets that are in a strong position to be able to deal with the economic challenges that we face in providing important support to people right across the country—including those who have lined up at Centrelink offices today and those who have communicated their intention to make claims in relation to the payments and various other supports and assistance that are there. We have entered this crisis in one of the strongest positions in the world, both at a state level and at a Commonwealth level.

As I just noted in response to the Leader of the Opposition's question, over 1,600 people have now contracted that virus and the rate of increase has been escalating now for several weeks, particularly over the past week since COAG met in Sydney just over a week ago.

I remember very well when the National Incident Response Room was set up on 20 January this year. The Deputy Prime Minister and I visited that centre just two days later. That was the first of the many statements and initiatives that were put in place by the government to ensure that we were working to combat this virus, as it would seek to take hold of our community.

From that time, there have been numerous decisions. Those actions have encompassed our economic response but also, most importantly and first and foremost, the health response. The health response has been about ensuring that we're resourcing the needs that are there both in our aged-care system and in our health system. Some $3 billion of additional support has gone into our health system, to support our hospitals, to support primary care, to support our aged-care facilities, and to support our aged-care workforce and our health workforce right across the country, to ensure that they can meet the growing demands that will continue to present.

We have also established the national cabinet—a national cabinet of all Australian governments—to ensure wherever possible we can coordinate the actions of the national response between the actions of all Australian governments as they seek to put in place the measures that best address the issues in their states. Travel bans have been put in place. Strict social distancing measures have been put in place for large outdoor gatherings as well as enclosed gatherings, including those arrangements that I set out last night. The health system has received additional support and will receive more. The messaging regarding personal hygiene and social distancing has been conveyed to the public and will continue to be conveyed to the public.
The economic stimulus package and the safety net package that we announced yesterday are there to ensure that we can assist Australians get through this crisis. Of course we will be tested, and the Australian government will continue to take the actions that protect the lives and livelihoods of Australians.

COVID-19

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is again to the Prime Minister. What steps is the Prime Minister taking to improve the communication of measures related to the COVID-19 outbreak, including the rules on testing, advice to parents on school closures and the difference between essential and non-essential activities?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:08): Some $30 million has been committed—and this was done several weeks ago—to support a public information campaign that particularly deals with the issues of healthy social distancing. That campaign is in place and that has been upgraded and expanded as required to deal with the very many messaging issues that need to be addressed.

The Leader of the Opposition makes reference to a couple of issues, particularly in relation to schools. Let me be very clear: the health advice from medical experts that advise the national cabinet is that schools should remain open. That is their advice. That has been their consistent advice. That advice from the AHPPC has not changed, and it is important that we all continue to act in accordance with that medical advice. In relation to the communication on the decisions that were undertaken last night and considered by the national cabinet, they have been conveyed by the state and territory governments, as they are putting the specific arrangements in place in each of their state and territory jurisdictions.

The Leader of the Opposition makes reference to 'essential' and 'non-essential'. The essential activities were defined in relation to public gatherings, outdoor gatherings, of 500 persons or more. They were set out in the Victorian legislation, which was the model legislation that was being used by other states and territories. That information was communicated and set out last week. Last night there were very clear instructions about a specific list of indoor spaces that would not be continuing to allow gatherings past midday today local time in each of the state and territory jurisdictions. States and territories are communicating with the industries and sectors, and the national communications campaign will continue to be updated to ensure that all of that information, including on the australia.gov.au website which has the most recent decisions, is there and available to the public.

COVID-19

Dr ALLEN (Higgins) (14:10): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline to the House how a national cabinet has been brought together to focus and coordinate government resources and responses to the coronavirus global health pandemic so we can provide the best possible assistance to Australians during what is an unprecedented health and economic challenge?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:10): I thank the member for Higgins for her question and I also thank her for her counsel and advice with her background as a doctor. There are many doctors in this place, and I'm sure we've turned to them on occasion and I certainly appreciate the input I've received from the member for Higgins.

For the first time ever in Australia's federal history, we've established a national cabinet—that is a national cabinet of the governments of Australia, all states and territories, together with the Commonwealth, and the leaders of each of those executive governments coming together to ensure there can be coordination between the executive decisions of those governments in terms of the national response to the coronavirus crisis.

Those governments hold independent, individual sovereignty over the decisions that they hold under their various constitutions and subject only to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. But this mechanism has proved to be very effective in drawing together the many issues that the state and territory governments, together with the Commonwealth, need to address to ensure consistency wherever possible.

The national cabinet has met on four occasions in just the past 10 days. It meets even more urgently, as required, based on consultation with the members of the national cabinet. They have activated the second stage of the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for the Coronavirus. They have banned non-essential mass gatherings of more than 500 people from Monday 16 March. Travel restrictions on cruise ships destined for Australia's borders commenced on 13 March for cruise ships from foreign ports. The universal self-isolation requirement on all international arrivals was effective from Sunday 15 March. They endorsed the medical expert panel advice, the AHPPC advice, against the bulk purchase of food, medicines and other goods. They endorsed the Commonwealth's decision to close Australia's borders to noncitizens and nonresidents at 9 pm Australian Eastern Daylight Time on Friday 20 March that followed on from the earlier travel bans that the Commonwealth put in place prior to the formation of the national cabinet. Non-essential indoor gatherings of greater than 100

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people have not been permitted from Wednesday 18 March, and a four-square-metre rule as a guideline was put in place on 20 March. Further announcements were made on those indoor gatherings last night on the basis of the national cabinet meeting last night.

Domestic travel: all Australians should only consider travelling when it is essential. If people are unwell, they must stay at home unless seeking medical care. Aged-care facilities enabling consistent public health directions on visitor restrictions are to complement regulatory standards that were adopted by the Commonwealth. Those restrictions have been implemented through both the work of the Commonwealth government through our accreditation processes as well as public orders provided by the state governments. Of course stage 1 restrictions were put in place last night on 23 March which relate to many places of social gathering—pubs, registered and licensed clubs; gyms and indoor sporting venues; cinemas; entertainment venues; casinos and nightclubs; restaurants and cafes being restricted to takeaway and home delivery; and religious gatherings and places of worship. As the number of cases grows, the national cabinet will continue to take the decisions based on the expert medical advice that we are receiving on a daily basis.

COVID-19

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:13) My question is for the Prime Minister. I refer to the government's expansion of Medicare telehealth rebates to some patients and services. Will the government expand telehealth rebates to all patients and services so that Australians don't have to visit a health provider during this crisis when it's not absolutely necessary? In particular, will the Prime Minister agree to expand telehealth rebates to mental health services and also provide mental health screening to people affected by COVID-19 and ensure dedicated services for children, parents and health workers?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (14:14): I thank the opposition spokesperson for this question. The answer is, yes, we will be taking those steps. Shortly before question time we announced the third stage of our telehealth expansion. The first stage of telehealth expansion was announced with the initial package of activities, with regard to the $2.4 billion of health activities. That, in particular, provided telehealth to those who were in isolation or seeking diagnosis for coronavirus, but also to vulnerable groups who were not within those areas. The second stage, which commenced on 16 March, was an expansion of telehealth items for midwives. It recognises a general practice for continuity of care practices, which means a broader access for people who were otherwise vulnerable. Then, today, in a joint statement with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian Medical Association, in conjunction with the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, ACRRM, and the RDAA, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, we announced a further expansion of telehealth. That expansion allows all medical practitioners who are vulnerable to be able to practise from home.

As part of that, we have announced that we will be moving to and designing stage 4. The medical practitioners were very, very, very clear that they wanted to design this carefully and in a staged capacity. Stage 4 is whole-of-population access to telehealth. The reasons it is being done in a staged capacity are twofold. One, there is a very important need to maintain face-to-face services, whether it is for conditions that might be cardiac, or conditions that might involve musculoskeletal challenges, or conditions that might involve diagnoses through the ability to actually test and feel and see a patient's condition. All of these were identified by the medical practitioners as a critical step forward. Telehealth for whole-of-population is now being designed in conjunction with those groups I have just outlined. It is being led by Professor Michael Kidd, who is working with the government. We have now had over 100,000 telehealth services provided, and they are continuing at well over 20,000 a day. Stage 4 will allow that to be provided on a whole-of-population basis. The other thing we wanted to do is make sure that smaller general practices were protected, which was a specific request. All of these elements are part of the current design.

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:17): on indulgence—I thank the minister for his answer and acknowledge the announcement he has made. It was a suggestion made by the opposition in good faith. We are very pleased that the minister has taken it up. It has been based on very strong feedback from GPs and allied healthcare professionals. Also, in relation to mental health, I completely understand the government's focus on physical health, but we all need to turn our attention to the mental health of Australians as we get through this crisis. I thank the minister for his response.

COVID-19

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (14:18): My question is to the Prime Minister. A key factor in who will live and who will die from the coronavirus is the number of intensive care beds, especially the number of ventilators. Prime Minister, do you have a plan to at least double the number of intensive care units and secure the ventilators we need, and if there is such a plan, when will this goal be achieved?
Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:18): I will make a brief comment and then pass on to the Minister for Health. The modelling work that is being done to provide advice to the government, and to the other Australian governments, is to ensure that we seek to manage the spread of this virus in such a way that it will avoid what would otherwise be quite intensive peak demands. I think we all understand that. The first line of attack in this is social distancing and other measures that will significantly alleviate the pressure on the health system. That is the first thing we need to do. But what we have done in putting those modelling processes together is to look at the potential impact on what the effect will be on those intensive care units, but also emergency departments and other parts of the health system. That will mean ensuring that we maintain medical supplies and we manage the health workforce within the hospitals that can best ensure that those beds and services are there when they're needed. We, at this point, have a very low number of patients that are actually in ICU, but of course we expect that to change as things change with the spread of the virus in the future. I will ask the health minister to add further on respirators and other matters of that nature.

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (14:19): Thank you very much, Prime Minister, and the member for Melbourne. As the Prime Minister said, there are two parts to the strategy. One is to reduce the demand or to flatten the curve, as is now a phrase which is sadly all too familiar to all Australians as well as everybody in this chamber. That's about reducing the number of people who contract coronavirus and spreading the load whilst protecting the vulnerable.

At the same time, since the very earliest times when the Chief Medical Officer declared this to be a disease of human pandemic potential on 21 January, he and the state chief health officers, the state ministers—and I want to thank all of the state ministers as their health services are doing an extraordinary job, and I particularly want to thank NSW Health and the New South Wales minister, Brad Hazzard; they have borne the brunt of this, and they have done a Herculean job—and all of the leaders have been focusing on this. It's been one of the key elements—and normally we wouldn't say this—in the National Security Committee requests that the Prime Minister has made, to compare peak demand with peak supply. We are seeking to double the capacity of intensive care units, if not more, including ventilators. I can inform the House that there has been a major order for an extra 1,000 ventilators, what are called invasive ventilators, placed with ResMed. Non-invasive ventilators are now being determined by the AHPPC requirement, and four firms have stepped in to help with production—ResMed, GE, Philips and Medtronic. They are showing a spirit which is beyond what any of us could have hoped. We thank them. We honour them. We will work with them.

COVID-19

Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (14:21): My question is for the Minister for Health. Will the minister update the House on the spread of coronavirus in Australia and the latest advice to Australia from medical experts?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (14:21): I want to thank the member for Goldstein. I particularly want to acknowledge what he has done in his community, as many members on all sides of this chamber have done, in helping to bring their communities together in programs such as supporting seniors and others who are isolated, and building volunteer programs. It's something that each and every one of us can do in our own communities. I know my Mornington shire, under the leadership of the mayor, Sam Hearn, have done similar things. I just wanted to acknowledge that example, but I know that there are people on all sides of the chamber doing a similar thing.

In terms of the situation, as the Prime Minister set out, there are now over 1,600 cases, informed to us by the national incident centre just prior to coming here today, and very significantly 135,000 tests have been carried out. That number will increase as the course of the day goes on. That is one of the highest actual numbers in the world. It's also one of the highest per capita numbers—now over half a per cent of the population—but, with the available data we have seen, that is one of the lowest, if not the lowest, positive rates. What does that actually mean? It means that we are testing broadly and more widely than almost anybody else, and therefore picking up cases. That's an extremely important thing. That's why in the advice that the AHPPC, or the medical expert panel, to which the Prime Minister referred previously, put out last night was that the situation with our first thousand cases is somewhat different to that of other countries such as Italy and the USA when they were at a thousand. They then set out what was the case with regard to the sad and tragic loss of life, where it was much higher in other countries than it has been in Australia.

The latest advice is seven lives lost, sadly. But, interestingly, they go on to say that we have one of the lowest COVID-19 test positivity rates in the world—approximately one per cent—compared to the USA of 13 per cent, the UK of five per cent and even the Republic of Korea, or South Korea, of three per cent. Most interestingly, there have been, at this stage, on the last advice that I have—and it may have changed—less than 20 cases that have been to ICU. That's a very important sign. What that says is that our actual recognition of cases is much more accurate than many other comparable countries, and that's shown by the level of lives lost relative to the first
1,000 and the level of ICU cases, both of which are far lower than the rest of the world. Against that background, the steps that we are taking, as we have said—ventilators, the work on testing, the work and preparation of ICUs—all of these things, as I may have a chance to explore later, are being done through a combination of primary care, aged care, hospitals and research. It is a comprehensive program. Yes, it is moving, and I must say a special thanks to all of our health workers, who are our real heroes around the country.

COVID-19

**Dr FREELANDER** (Macarthur) (14:24): My question is to the Prime Minister. Frontline health, aged-care and home-care workers have said that Australia's response to COVID-19 has been undermined by shortages of personal protective equipment such as masks and gowns. What is the government doing to address this urgent shortage?

**Mr MORRISON** (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:25): I thank the member for his question. This is one of the key issues that the government has been working on for many months now to ensure that those supplies are in place. That also means managing demand for those supplies, whether it is in the dental sector or even how that PPE equipment is being provided in particular contexts. It is being provided in the most urgent of cases. One of the most important discussions we had recently at the national cabinet was how elective surgery was being managed, because that also has a big draw on that type of equipment, as you would know. So I welcome decisions, like in Western Australia, for example, where they are confining elective surgery to stage 1 and urgent stage 2. I understand that that is now being practised around all states and territories. So, again, this is as much about managing demand as it is about ensuring supply, but I will ask the Minister for Health to add to this answer. The minister for industry may wish to answer as well, because she has been working to ensure a domestic supply to increase our capacity to produce that equipment here in Australia. That includes the support of the Australian Defence Force.

**Mr HUNT** (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (14:26): Thank you very much, Prime Minister. I acknowledge the history and service of the member for Macarthur. To date, more than 3.1 million masks have been deployed from the National Medical Stockpile. This includes to primary health networks, general practices, community pharmacies, Aboriginal community controlled health organisations and state health authorities. Additional distributions are planned this week. We have had significant supplies arrive over the weekend, and we have over 300 million masks on order.

I do want to be honest: there has been some practice at some borders where some countries or individuals have diverted some of those supplies at the last minute. It is a difficult world out there, and we're doing everything we can to make sure that those masks that are ordered are arriving. Those orders are very significant, and they are being distributed as they arrive. We do have supplies which are being shared out with dentists and others. The supplies are being managed very carefully by the National Medical Stockpile. They are triaging and prioritising. Again I thank the health workers. One of the significant things we're doing is the extraordinary domestic production, which is now being ramped up. I will refer to the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology.

**Mrs ANDREWS** (McPherson—Minister for Industry, Science and Technology) (14:27): To add to the responses already given by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health, we are working very closely with manufacturers right across Australia for them to either ramp up their production or to change their manufacturing processes so that they can produce the PPE that is needed. That includes things such as gloves, gowns, masks and critical pieces of infrastructure and supplies that are needed, which includes ventilators, as has already been touched on. I am happy to add to that later.

COVID-19

**Ms LIU** (Chisholm) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for Health. Will the minister outline for the House what actions the Morrison government is taking to respond to the serious challenge of the coronavirus?

**Mr HUNT** (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet) (14:28): I thank the member for Chisholm. Many members in this House have faced many pressures over the last two months. Few have faced more pressures than the member for Chisholm. In the earliest days of this outbreak, when borders were closed with China, perhaps before almost any other significant country, she along with others fielded many of the questions and the pressures that fell upon the Chinese community particularly. She managed that with great grace and dignity and effectiveness.

Our overall plan is built around four pillars: firstly, primary care; secondly, aged care; thirdly, hospitals; fourthly, vaccines and medical research. That is underpinned by the work in relation to critical supplies, which has been addressed during the course of today.
In relation to primary care, we focused, as I said, on telehealth earlier. Those facilities are now being ramped up to stage 3. As I have indicated, we will work to a whole-of-population plan in conjunction with the medical authorities and representatives over the course of the coming days, with more than 100,000 services having been provided.

In relation to testing, this has been one of our most important elements. There was a global supply of test kits. I can inform the House we now have a significant number of test kits, more than 1½ million test kits, of different forms, on order. We have had a series of different approvals provided by the TGA over the course of the weekend for different types of what are called point-of-care tests. These will include different types of finger-prick tests, and significant orders have been made. We also have the work on preparation for Indigenous communities.

I particularly want to focus on aged care. More than half a billion dollars all up, with an initial $100 million and an over $440 million package, has been provided. This is looking at three elements in relation to aged care. The first $100 million was about emergency support in cases such as Dorothy Henderson Lodge. The additional funding then goes to ensuring that we have retention of current staff. There will be a significant staff bonus, which will amount to approximately $800 per quarter for full-time equivalent residential-care staff and to $600 per quarter for full-time equivalent home-care staff. Then we have funds for extra staff, and other costs which will be required by aged-care facilities.

We recognise that the pressures on those facilities are great. This is where our most vulnerable are. We have seen, with Dorothy Henderson Lodge, the tragic consequences if infections are allowed in. So, in preparing them, in preparing hospitals, as I mentioned earlier, and in the research, we are taking a comprehensive approach.

COVID-19

Ms CATHERINE KING (Ballarat) (14:32): My question is to the Prime Minister. Who is responsible for allowing passengers to disembark the Ruby Princess cruise ship, many of whom are now presenting with coronavirus symptoms? Why isn't Australia taking the temperature of all international passengers on arrival at our airports and ship terminals still today?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:32): Upon arrival in Sydney on 19 March, and following immigration and customs clearance, the vessel was placed under the control of the New South Wales authorities, including New South Wales Health and the Port Authority of New South Wales, who lead the human quarantine process. Australian government quarantine and self-isolation requirements were communicated through announcements and fact sheets, and declaration cards were required for all crew and passengers. I remind all passengers from the Ruby Princess that they need to self-isolate for 14 days, like all travellers arriving from overseas.

I note that New South Wales Health has stated that it undertook a full assessment of the Ruby Princess and allowed the passengers to disembark. The Chief Health Officer of New South Wales said that this was considered a low risk, given that it is transported between Sydney and New Zealand. I also note that yesterday the Australian Defence Force provided assistance to the New South Wales health department to provide contact-tracing support, with a team to undertake contact-tracing activities, including relating to passengers from this vessel.

In relation to the broader measures of screening at airports, the screening arrangements that have been put in place have targeted high-risk countries. That has been done on the advice of the AHPPC.

COVID-19

Mr WALLACE (Fisher) (14:33): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on what action the Morrison government is taking to support Australian households, including casuals, sole traders, retirees and those on income support, during the coronavirus pandemic?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (14:34): I thank the member for Fisher for his question and acknowledge, with his background in business, his focus on ensuring that his constituents and, indeed, the people of Australia can continue to stay in a job and that businesses can stay in business. The economic environment, both domestically and internationally, has deteriorated. We expect that the economic shock from the coronavirus will be deeper, will be wider and will be longer. As a result, today we introduced into this parliament a series of bills which represent the most significant support, outside of wartime, for the Australian community and economy.

There is $189 billion of support being injected into the Australian economy in just the last 10 days in terms of announcements. We've partnered with the Reserve Bank of Australia. We're working closely with the commercial banks of Australia to support their customers. And, of course, we have had our first stimulus package, and our second package, which has been designed to support the Australian people by cushioning the blow, particularly for those who have seen their income being reduced or their hours reduced or who are being stood down or,
indeed, becoming unemployed. This is very much a 'Team Australia' moment for everyone to come together for the same end.

In terms of the specific measures that we have announced, there's a $550 coronavirus supplement, which effectively doubles what was known as Newstart and now is known as the jobseeker payment. There's a second $750 payment that will go to more than five million Australians. The first payment, which will go from 31 March, is going to 6½ million Australians. People on a carer's payment, people on family tax benefits, people on a Commonwealth seniors health card, people on a disability support pension and, indeed, more than two million people on a pension will be receiving the $750 payments.

We've also changed the deeming rates. That is important because, obviously, many pensioners are affected by that. We're also changing the drawdown rates by halving them, as those opposite did during the GFC, to make it easier for retirees to control their own savings and their own super, and we're providing early access to superannuation for people who have been impacted by the coronavirus. That is very significant because that is the people's own money—$10,000 this year, $10,000 next year—which will help cushion the blow, together with our other measures.

COVID-19

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (14:37): My question is for the Prime Minister. What are Treasury's forecasts for the impact of COVID-19 on the economy, including on growth, jobs and businesses?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Cooyong—Treasurer) (14:37): Treasury believe that the measures we've introduced will add the equivalent of about five per cent worth of GDP in the June quarter and around seven per cent of GDP in the September quarter. When it comes to growth, Treasury believe that in terms of the June quarter it could add up to 2¼ per cent and in terms of September it could add up to 3½ per cent. That doesn't take into account the obvious negative impact of the coronavirus. But, in costing the coronavirus supplement, Treasury estimate that up to a million people, in addition to those who are already on Newstart, could be accessing this new coronavirus supplement. That's a lot of people. But not every one of those people are actually out of a job and unemployed. It could mean that, if you are a sole trader whose income has reduced or if you're someone who's a casual who's had their hours reduced, you can still access this new coronavirus supplement without, effectively, being unemployed. That's the work Treasury has undertaken. It's obviously a very difficult situation to predict. Treasury themselves, as the member for Rankin would be aware, have said that producing forecasts and estimates in this environment—just as the Reserve Bank have said—is very difficult. But those are their best estimates about some of the numbers involved in our costings.

COVID-19

Mr DRUM (Nicholls—Chief Nationals Whip) (14:38): My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development. Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House how the Morrison-McCormack government is ensuring that freight and logistic supply chains continue to deliver food and supplies around Australia in this challenging time?

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Leader of the Nationals) (14:39): I thank the member for Nicholls for his question. He represents towns such as Seymour, Shepparton, Yarrawonga, Echuca and Cobram, and they all fit very neatly into the supply chain. They produce a lot of food in the electorate of Nicholls. If every farmer in the Murray-Bidgee irrigation area produces enough food to feed 450 foreigners and 150 Australians each year, they'd be no different from the farmers in the member for Nicholls' electorate. They're fine people and we thank them for the work that they do.

Australians, as we all know, are resilient people. They will get through this together—we will get through this together. This government is working hard every single day and every single night to make sure we get through this unprecedented time, this time of crisis. While restrictions on the movement and association of people are necessary, I want to reassure Australians that logistics and supply chains remain in place. There will be no shortage of food for families over coming months.

Just look at the facts. Our agriculture sector is a net exporter, producing enough food for 75 million people. There's more than enough to go around. Our supply chain, farm gate to plate, is effective and efficient and will continue to deliver. It will not let Australians down. Our truckies, the heartbeat of our nation, will continue to deliver food and other necessary supplies to the supermarkets. I will add in there our train drivers. Rail will play its part too of course. There is just no need to hoard food, to raid regional supermarkets. It is not on; it has to stop; people have to desist from doing it. We will not run out of food. To help make sure of that I've been chairing regular teleconferences of state Transport and Infrastructure Council members. We've liaised with the shadow minister, the member for Ballarat, and we've talked to key stakeholders. As I've said—and I'll say it again—we
will get through this together. We're working to ensure that freight and logistics supply chains remain sound and continue to operate effectively. Freight and logistics are critical to this nation; particularly, as the member for Nicholls well knows, to the regions.

The aviation sector, of course, is already experiencing a considerable downturn, with most airlines operating drastically reduced services. In addition to creating the $715 million aviation package to provide a range of relief from taxes and charges, the government is working very closely, very collaboratively and very cooperatively with the airlines to make sure they'll be in a position to get people moving again once the travel restrictions are lifted. The airline sector is crucial, and we'll continue to do everything we can to ensure it survives.

As well as our various economic actions to back regional Australians and their jobs and to keep the doors of small business open, the government has set aside a billion dollars for the regions' communities and industry sector, to ensure that those most impacted by the coronavirus will receive the help they deserve and need.

COVID-19

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:42): My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. According to the government's proposed legislation before the House, the coronavirus supplement will not begin until 27 April, most people won't receive the first payment to households until April and the second payment until July, pensioners won't see a boost in their income due to the changing deeming rates until 1 May, and employers won't receive a cash flow boost until 28 April. When we all agree that the economy needs immediate support, why will these payments take so long to start?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (14:43): I thank the member for his question. The packages and measures are dealing with different challenges. When it comes to those who are on fixed incomes, obviously—through benefit payments and things of that nature—their incomes are not being directly affected, because they are on those fixed-income payments. The payments that the member refers to, the $750 payments, are coming in April and they are coming in July. Those individuals will continue to receive all the other income at the same levels they have been receiving it, and that will provide a pulse support to them at that time, on those two occasions. As I've said at length, we need to be in a position not just to do this now but to continue to do it for at least the next six months, and if we have to extend these measures further then of course we will.

One of the other important principles we have applied as we have put these various packages of assistance together is that we have sought to use existing payment mechanisms both in the tax system and in the payment system. The Leader of the Opposition may be aware that the redesigning of major payment systems would only add even further delay to the processes of getting additional payments out to benefit recipients. Working through the payments systems that we have enables us to get these payments to Australians in the most effective way possible. I note that in overseas jurisdictions where they are not following these principles and are designing new schemes there is further complication in setting up payment systems, which means those payments are even further away.

Our department of government services will be working night and day and taking on some additional 3,000 staff to ensure that they can meet the timing requirements. If it can be done more quickly than that, in the turn-around of these arrangements, I have no doubt it will be. The public servants, particularly here in the ACT, are doing an outstanding job in turning around these measures. Those Public Service members are out there doing that job, working late into the night to ensure they can turn this around as quickly as possible. They're the ones on the phones taking the many calls from distressed Australians. They're the ones who are redesigning systems. They're the ones at Centrelink offices. They are doing a fantastic job. We will continue to support them to do that job as effectively as possible and with the additional resources they need to turn around this support as fast as we can provide it.

COVID-19

Mr YOUNG (Longman) (14:45): My question is for the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on what the Morrison government is doing to provide regulatory protection and financial support to help small businesses stay in business during this challenging time?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (14:45): I thank the member for Longman for his question and his support for the government's efforts to ensure that Australians can remain in a job and businesses can remain in business. Our stimulus package No. 1 and our second package, which is designed to cushion the blow and enhance the safety net, involve measures that are targeted, temporary and scalable and that use, as the Prime Minister said, our existing tax and transfer system. I want to put on the record my appreciation for the Department of the Treasury and the secretary, for their close help and outstanding work, and of course for the Department of Finance, in preparing this package. Treasury and Finance have done a wonderful job.
We have focused on supporting small and medium-sized businesses to keep people employed. Three out of every four dollars that we spent in the first stimulus package were designed to support small business. Among the numerous important measures that we have announced are measures like expanding and extending the instant asset write-off and accelerated depreciation. In terms of the instant asset write-off, we have taken it from companies who have a turnover of up to $50 million and extended it to those with a turnover of up to $500 million. We have taken it from purchases of $30,000 and extended it to purchases of $150,000. When it comes to the 50 per cent accelerated depreciation, we have also extended it to companies with a turnover of up to $500 million, and out to June 2021. Other initiatives include a 50 per cent wage subsidy for employers who have apprentices. There are 117,000 apprentices. Whether carpenters, plumbers, mechanics or hairdressers, it will be easier for people who are employing these apprentices to keep them on in work, despite the difficult times, because of the wage subsidy. Our other support through the tax system, providing cash flow support, is critical for 690,000 small and medium-sized businesses and 30,000 not-for-profits. This is a $32 billion measure that we have announced, from a minimum of $20,000 up to a maximum of $100,000 cash payments to small and medium-sized businesses. We have worked with the banks to ensure that there are no interest payments or principal payments for small business on loans for six month. That will be an important lifeline, as will the fact that we're co-guaranteeing, with the banks and other lenders, loans of up to $250,000 for three years, with no payments in the first six months. That is extremely important, as are the regulatory changes around insolvency and bankruptcy laws to ensure that businesses can trade through this difficult time. We are standing with small and medium-sized business operators and all their employees through this very difficult time.

The SPEAKER (14:48): The Prime Minister, on indulgence?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (00:00): I want to add to an answer I just gave. It is 5,000 additional staff that we're putting on in government services and related areas to deal with the workload. The earlier number related to the earlier package we were working on. The second package upgraded that amount to 5,000.

COVID-19

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (14:49): My question is for the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm that, under the business cash flow measure, businesses will be paid based on their staffing levels in the first quarter of this year, not on how many staff they have kept on through the crisis? Doesn't that mean that employers who stand down staff will receive the same assistance as employers who keep people in work?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (14:49): I can confirm to the House that the wages bill, which is assessed based on the tax withheld, will count all the way to 30 June, both for quarterly and monthly BAS payments. Now, of course, how much a particular business will receive will depend on the size of its wages bill, and there are going to be individual circumstances, but, for a quarterly payer, the wages bill, up to and including 30 June, is relevant to how much that business will receive—that is, whether they receive the minimum of $20,000 or up to $100,000. There is an alignment of interests between the employer here and the employee. Small and medium-sized businesses are doing it tough, and they want to keep their employees on as much as possible. They also have other expenses, as the honourable member would understand. What is relevant to the assessment of how much a business will get can be all the way up to 30 June in relation to their particular BAS statements.

COVID-19

Ms FLINT (Boothby—Government Whip) (14:50): My question is for the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Minister for Government Services. Will the minister outline to the House how the Morrison government is supporting Australians, including vulnerable Australians, who are being impacted by the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus?

Mr ROBERT (Fadden—Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Minister for Government Services) (14:51): I thank the member for Boothby for her question. Building on what the Prime Minister has said, the government is establishing a new time-limited coronavirus supplement to be paid at a rate of $550 per fortnight. This means anyone eligible for the maximum jobseeker payment will now receive more than $1,100 a fortnight, effectively doubling the payment for the next six months. This will be paid to both existing and new recipients of the jobseeker payment, the youth allowance, the parenting payment, the farm household allowance and the special benefit.

Eligible income-support recipients will receive the full amount of the $550 coronavirus supplement on top of their payment each fortnight. We're also waiving the one-week ordinary waiting period, the liquid asset waiting period and the newly arrived resident waiting period. In addition, there are a range of other supplements that are triggered when someone gains access to the jobseeker payment. This includes the energy supplement, the
pharmaceutical allowance and the Commonwealth rent assistance, which pays up to $139 for singles and more for families. The government provides family tax benefit A and B, which potentially puts hundreds of dollars more into the pocket of those families to help cushion the blow in this difficult time.

On Sunday, the Prime Minister announced further $750 payments will be made to Australians on income support who are not eligible for this coronavirus supplement. This includes those receiving the age pension, carers allowance and the family tax benefits, as well as disability support pensioners, veterans, income support recipients, student payment recipients and eligible concession cardholders. For those eligible, this payment is in addition to the $750 stimulus payment announced on 12 March. It will automatically be paid from 13 July to about five million Australians. Half of those who will benefit are on the age pension.

The first $750 payment will be paid from 31 March to people who have been on one of the eligible payments any time between 12 March and 13 April. We’ve also announced a further reduction in the deeming rate of 25 basis points to reflect the latest rate reductions by the RBA. As of 1 May, the lower deeming rate will be 0.25 per cent and the upper deeming rate will be 2.25 per cent. This will benefit about 900,000 income support recipients, including age pensioners.

I want to assure all Australians that the Morrison government is absolutely committed to supporting everyone through the very difficult months ahead so that we can bounce back as a nation a lot stronger than ever before.

COVID-19

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (14:54): My question is also to the Minister for Government Services. I refer to the fact that the myGov website crashed shortly before 9 am this morning. Was this because the site only permits a limited number of people to access the site at once and was simply overwhelmed, or was there another reason? When will the delays be over?

Mr ROBERT (Fadden—Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Minister for Government Services) (14:54): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The advice to me this morning was that myGov attracted 95,000 concurrent users at 9.40 am. That triggered the DDoS alarms—denial of service attack alarms—going off and slowed the system. The system had been designed for 55,000 concurrent users, so it was overloaded by hitting 95,000. Fifty-five thousand is the maximum number. It was doing 6,500 users last week. We are currently looking at how we expand the 55,000 concurrent users to a stronger basis.

I also asked the department to investigate the DDoS alarm triggering, and the advice to me is as follows: ‘Our systems have had multiple and sustained denial of service attacks over the past few weeks. The network alert status is now at high. This, combined with all of the data’—the 95,000 users—‘gave rise to a very strained performance because of the high number of usage, and that caused the outage. The DDoS alarms show no evidence of a specific attack today.’ The advice here doesn't mean there is no need for heightened cybersecurity. We do need to remind all of our clients that, unfortunately, nefarious actors will use the current situation to their advantage, and we have seen the ACSC put out advisory notices about things today.

COVID-19

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde—Chief Government Whip) (14:56): My question is to the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations. Will the Attorney-General update the House on how the Morrison government is working with employers and employees, as well as their representatives, to provide certainty about workplace rights and entitlements as we tackle the impacts of coronavirus?

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (14:56): I thank the member for his question. I think probably the coarsest but most accurate summary I can give is that the challenges that we're facing are (1) around information and (2) around flexibility. Information is becoming absolutely critical, and the flows of information that will allow employers and employees to make the best decisions are becoming absolutely critical. The issue of flexibility, if we can get that right, could make a profound difference to the number of jobs that we can save through this, and it's a matter that we can work on on a bipartisan basis.

With respect to the information, as soon as we realised that this was going to cause enormous disruptions in the IR space, we dedicated a guidance page on the Fair Work Ombudsman website, which is interactive to the extent that it learns from itself. So information comes out about situations that were merely hypothetical weeks ago, and the advice is refined all the time in a general sense. That has had over half a million visits since we established it, which goes to show the level of information exchange and how critical it is. There's a direct advice line, 131394, with the Fair Work Ombudsman. That's had, very recently, a 250 per cent increase in the number of calls coming in. The information going out is, I think, of high standard and accurate, but we're improving it all the time. We also have, at the suggestion of one of the meetings that I had with employer and employee organisations, a
dedicated consultation page on the Attorney-General's Department website about the types of situations that are arising that we might need to think about how we can fix in the near future.

I also note for the benefit of the House that we're going to allocate an additional $42 million to the Fair Work Ombudsman to continually improve and ramp up this information delivery system. I can say, I think, that that information is not going to merely be of the traditional type, on what is the status and lawfulness of a decision and how it relates to the law, but will extend—short of legal advice—to the sort of thing where we're answering questions like what we can do or what we should be doing in certain circumstances.

As to the issue of flexibility, I think it's fair to say that the Fair Work Act wasn't designed with this challenge in mind, but there are provisions in the Fair Work Act which would allow for a modification of award with respect to extraordinary circumstances. Those extraordinary circumstances are here. Business and unions are doing a great job at the moment about trying to reach agreement. I can give one example, an example that was put to me with respect to a modern award. If you could modify the time and attendance record-keeping obligations in a modern award, that could save jobs, because many of them aren't coping with the fact that we are now needing to have people work from home. Some very important meetings are occurring now between senior union leaders, who have been fantastic, and senior business leaders, who have been fantastic, to see if they can reach agreement around the types of things and specific awards that we might be able to modify through existing processes provided for in the act to save jobs. They are cooperating as they have never cooperated before. They're cooperating as if jobs depend on that cooperation, because they do. I look forward to further cooperation from members opposite.

COVID-19

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (14:59): My question is for the Prime Minister. In response to COVID-19, other countries are providing wage subsidies of up to 80 per cent. The Australian government hasn't guaranteed any worker will benefit from a wage subsidy and, for a worker on a medium wage, that subsidy could be just 20 per cent. How will the government guarantee employers are able to keep workers on during this crisis with only a 20 per cent wage subsidy?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (15:00): I thank the member for his question. The government has designed measures to support the situation in Australia. There are many different responses all around the country. We are seeking to do two things: first, ensure that we can keep businesses as viable as possible, particularly under the rather stringent conditions we're asking businesses to operate under; and, second, ensure that those who do have loss to their income, those who do lose their jobs, those who are stood down and those sole traders who can't earn what they did before can get access to a strengthened safety net to support them through the many months that are ahead.

There will be massive changes in our economy. We want to ensure that businesses can still be there on the other side so they can do two things: first, keep Australians employed for as long as possible; and, second, if they're unable to do that, be in a position to re-employ them on the other side. This is the approach the government is taking. This is also the advice that we've received from Treasury. The issues in the United Kingdom were considered. Our Treasury actually recommended against us taking those measures, and I think that was sound advice. The measures, as they are being designed in United Kingdom, require a complete redesign of delivery mechanisms which will take many months, and they aren't immune from the sorts of integrity issues that, sadly and inevitably, follow poorly designed measures. I trust and I hope they get it right.

The government are endeavouring to get the safety net to you if you find yourself in a position where you've lost income or lost your job or if you are a sole trader. And if we need to further enhance or strengthen these safety net provisions then we will. This is a safety net for all Australians. Whether you run a small business, whether you're a casual employee or whether you're an employee—permanent, part-time or whatever—we are seeking to strengthen the safety net for you and your family. It is not just the doubling, effectively, of the jobseeker payment but also the many other payments, whether it's family tax benefit, rental assistance or the many other supplements that exist within the automatic stabilisers of our system. We should have confidence that the social security system in Australia is one of the most targeted and most extensive anywhere in the world. It is built to ensure that when shocks hit like this, more and more Australians, particularly those who would be most vulnerable, will be supported. Whether you're on a higher wage or you're on a lower wage, if you find yourself in a position where you're no longer in a job, we want to give you that support and ensure that we can support you and your family through what will be a very difficult next six months at the very least.
COVID-19

Dr MARTIN (Reid) (15:03): My question is to the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology. Will the minister outline to the House how the Morrison government is working to support supply chain confidence during this very challenging time?

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson—Minister for Industry, Science and Technology) (15:03): I thank the member for her question. The coronavirus is challenging Australia and the rest of the world on so many fronts. That includes an unprecedented demand for food, for medicines and for vital equipment at this time. But I want to assure the Australian people that our supply chains are working well, are functioning well and remain open. I say that because I want to assure the Australian people that there is no need for them to panic buy. There is no need for them to hoard, particularly food and medicines.

When it comes to food, we can produce enough food for 75 million people, three times the population of Australia. Our food manufacturing sector has grown every quarter for the past four years, so it's thriving. We produce significant amounts of food, so there's nothing for Australians to be concerned about. I understand that it's alarming when you go into the supermarket and you don't see food on the shelves but that is a restocking issue rather than a supply issue, so rest assured that we do have sufficient supply. We also have a sufficient supply of medicines here in this country. So, again, there is no reason for you to have to panic buy and to hoard your medicines.

There have already been discussions and debates here today about personal protective equipment. I will take the remaining time to just add to my previous answer, particularly in relation to manufacturing of personal protective equipment. We have gone out with a request for information quite broadly across Australia so that we can bring out as many manufacturers as we can with regard to those who are capable of and are currently producing personal protective equipment and those who have the capacity to retool and to start producing those products. I want to speak about one of the businesses that we are currently helping. Med-Con, a manufacturer of surgical masks, based just outside Shepparton, has already doubled its manufacturing capacity of surgical masks and continues to do so with the support, over the short term, of the Australian Defence Force.

In relation to hand sanitisers—which, again, is something that people are starting to see is not on the shelves—I can say that production is fine. Ego Pharmaceuticals, which make Aquim sanitisers, are now producing 90,000 bottles a day—five times their forecast levels. So you will start to see hand sanitisers back on shelves very soon.

COVID-19

Mr MARLES (Corio—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:06): My question is to the Prime Minister, and it concerns the critical importance of education. Will the government guarantee resources to ensure that all students who can't attend school during the COVID-19 crisis won't miss out on learning opportunities?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (15:06): I thank the member for his question. This is a matter that has been the focus of a lot of my attention. The coronavirus crisis will take many things from this country, but one of the things that I am determined that it will not take is a year of learning from our children. This has been a key focus of the discussions of the national cabinet, ministers of education at the state level and, of course, here—and I acknowledge the Minister for Education. The arrangements that were put in place by the national cabinet last night were that schools should remain open. The advice says very clearly that the AHPPC does not support closure of schools at this time. They advise that there is no health reason for schools to be closed or for children not to go to school. I want to make that very clear: your children are safe to go to school, on the basis of the medical advice that has been provided to the national cabinet.

Two arrangements have been put in place for those students. Students can present at school and undergo their normal learning in classrooms in the way that it is conducted. The other way that many schools are looking at is to provide distance learning opportunities for those students who are at home. Whether the parents choose for their children to go to school or to remain at home, the children must be learning in either place. That is the absolute position of our government in supporting the states and territories under the existing funding arrangements that we have.

I agree with those who have said that teachers are not childminders; they are teachers. I want kids to go to school to learn and to be taught, not to be minded, and I want them to have classes in those places. I know that they are best positioned to learn when they go into a learning environment like that. We must sustain this for as long as is possible, subject to the health advice. That's why I have urged that we take the position to ensure that schools remain open, subject to that health advice.

I want to thank the teachers and I want to thank everyone who works in the school communities—the principals and others—who have been under enormous pressure, based on the various positions that have been commented
on around the country. They are making the best decisions they can, and I know that they are putting their students and their education first. I want to assure parents that we are doing exactly the same thing. We are going to be working closely with state and territory governments to ensure that children's education is protected, including early childhood education. You don't get to be four years old in another year. That year of your learning is very important, whether you are four or six or 10 or 16.

I'd also say to parents who choose to keep their children at home that they are at home for the purpose of learning, they are not home for the purpose of just running around and doing whatever they like. The decision to take children home from school and to keep them at home is intended to enable them to continue their learning at home. I would encourage parents to take the responsibility of that decision, as every parent has to, very seriously.

COVID-19

Mr LEESER (Berowra) (15:09): My question is to the Prime Minister. The coronavirus pandemic is changing the way we live and challenging us in ways we haven't experienced in almost a century. Would you please inform the House how meeting this challenge will require all Australians to do their duty as public citizens so we can get through this and emerge strong, safe and united on the other side?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Prime Minister and Minister for the Public Service) (15:10): I thank the member for Berowra for his question. I thank all members of this place and I thank all the staff of the members of this place for the incredible job they are doing providing support to their local communities at this very difficult time and disseminating information as best they can to their communities. I thank my own electorate office staff back in Cronulla, who are doing exactly the same thing as every member's office is doing. There are so many people putting in an extraordinary effort. I thank again the members of the national cabinet, all the premiers and chief ministers and all those who are working as part of their governments to make difficult decisions and get the best possible information to make those decisions. I thank the opposition for their cooperation in this chamber here as we work to ensure the parliament continues to function, that our democracy continues to operate and to support the various measures and supports that are necessary to see Australia through this very difficult crisis.

I want to thank all of those more broadly in the public service at the federal and state level—the nurses, the doctors, the Border Force officials, the police officers, the Centrelink staff, the teachers, the bus drivers and so many more—even those who were preparing the myriad of legislation which are on this desk over in the departments of Finance and Treasury and others at 2 or 3 am Saturday evening. Everyone is working hard for the benefit of the Australian people in the national service that they are all engaged in. I thank those who are able to keep going to work and keep doing their job and keep servicing their community in the private sector. I thank the employers who are keeping people in jobs for as long as they possibly can. On the other side, if they're unable to do that, they know they will want to stand those staff up again and put them back on their payrolls and put them back into those jobs when we build that bridge and get to the other side of the recovery.

I also want to thank those in the financial sector for the work that they have done with the Treasurer and others to ensure that the lifeline of credit, which is so important in an economic crisis, continues to be extended—and the waivers that are provided on payments and fees and interest and other things that relieve the burden. The energy companies have also come to the aid of the nation and are providing the same sort of relief. We are in this together. It's a national effort in which all Australians—all arms, all sections, all institutions of our country—are enlisted to work together to take the actions we need to bring all Australians through. But, importantly, it is at the most personal level, the interactions with each other, with our families, with our communities where we will be called on most. Through this, together we will make it to the other side.

I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

COVID-19

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the Opposition) (15:13): Can I repeat my call to spread kindness, not coronavirus at this time. This has been, up to this point today, an example of the parliament working as it should—people putting aside partisan interests in order to represent the national interest. We have been able to change standing orders in a way that is certainly unique under the circumstances. The arrangements of and maturity by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business, for example, in this place in putting together standing orders that ensure we will be able to deal with the major stimulus measures by 5 o'clock and the supply bills by 7.30 show that the parliament is able to work together at this difficult time.

There are some who said that the parliament should not meet. Can I say that, in my view, if we did not meet in this House at this time it would send a terrible message to the rest of the country, to the health workers working in hospitals, to the people working in aged care, to the people working in retail, to the people working in public
transport, to the people working in our schools and to the people working in our childcare centres. At a time like this it is absolutely critical that we show national leadership as national leaders in this parliament, whether we sit on the government benches, the opposition benches or the cross-benches. We've also been able to ensure that people are able to make a contribution to debate in this parliament. I hope this is a precedent that the government take up after we return, because people have been today and will continue to be this afternoon able to make a contribution. The cross-benches will be speaking after question time. We think it's important that people be able to put their views on the record. We, of course, don't support all of the measures in the legislation, but we're not going to block any measure, because we understand how important it is to get it out.

Can I say also that today in question time—I've been here a long time—was one of the times when Chris Bowen, the shadow health minister, asked a question of the Minister for Health and got an answer that changed, effectively, an outcome. I congratulate the health minister on the decision he has made on telehealth. It's an example of this parliament working as it should: people coming up with ideas, and if an idea is good it should be adopted, regardless of who it comes from. I congratulate the government on that and I congratulate my shadow health minister on the work that he has done.

We have more work to do this afternoon; hopefully, that will lead to a conclusion. There was work that we had to do in the caucus this morning, where we had full participation, either virtually or physically. People were determined to continue to represent their electorates and to engage with people in practical ways, including by helping people who need assistance with shopping, which is an example of something that our electorate officers can do. I thank all of our staff and, indeed, the staff of the parliament on the work that they have done.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Commonwealth Day

The SPEAKER (15:17): I have a statement with respect to Commonwealth Day, which is on 9 March each year. What I propose to do, if it suits the House, is simply to table that statement. I also table a message from Her Majesty the Queen, which is issued to all Commonwealth countries.

BILLS

Guarantee of Lending to Small and Medium Enterprises (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020

Australian Business Growth Fund (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020

Assistance for Severely Affected Regions (Special Appropriation) (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020

Structured Finance Support (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020

Appropriation (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill (No. 1) 2019-2020

Appropriation (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill (No. 2) 2019-2020

Boosting Cash Flow for Employers (Coronavirus Economic Response Package) Bill 2020

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That these bills be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

"whilst not declining to give these bills a second reading, the House calls on the Government to more quickly implement the measures it is proposing, noting that under the current proposal:

(1) the Coronavirus supplement will not begin until 27 April 2020;

(2) expanded access to the Jobseeker Payment and Youth Allowance won't begin until 27 April 2020;

(3) most people won't receive the first payment to households until April 2020 or the second payment until July 2020;

(4) pensioners won't see a boost in their income due to the change in deeming rates until 1 May 2020; and

(5) employers won't receive a cash flow boost until 28 April 2020".

to which the following amendment was moved:

That the following words be added:

"(6) there is no conditionality on assistance measures to business to keep workers employed; and
(7) calls on the Government to legislate for a mechanism that provides sufficient incentive for employers to keep employees in work”.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That the following words be added after paragraph (7):

"(8) (a) every Australian deserves a dignified retirement;
   (b) Australians are proud of our world-class superannuation system;
   (c) drawing down on superannuation when the market is at historic lows will have negative implications for most Australians, and should only be an option of last resort; and
   (d) the administrative arrangements specified in Schedule 13 of the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 will not ensure that Australians in genuine hardship receive prompt payment from their superannuation fund;

(9) calls on the Government to:
   (a) ensure that ordinary Australians have access to the right information and advice in times of hardship by increasing funding for financial counselling and the Centrelink Financial Information Service; and
   (b) closely monitor the financial advice industry to ensure that early release claimants are not provided with inaccurate advice; and
   (10) asks the Government to:
      (a) table a letter from the Chair of the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, certifying that the implementation of Schedule 13 will have no systemic impacts on the superannuation system; and
      (b) consult with industry, unions, and representatives of other political parties before the implementation of the measures in Schedule 13, noting the potentially significant, negative impact on the retirement outcomes of ordinary Australians.”

Mr CONROY (Shortland) (15:19): It is a privilege and my duty to rise and speak to these bills. As the Leader of the Opposition made the point, it's a rare moment in parliamentary history where we're debating bills of this importance and substance. That's because we're facing a crisis of almost unprecedented proportions—a crisis that is having a devastating economic impact and, if we do not manage this properly, will have a devastating health impact.

I wholeheartedly endorse the statements given by the Labor leader and shadow Treasurer earlier today. I think their approach, and Labor's approach in general, has been measured and constructive—an approach where we've pointed out where we have concerns around particular parts of the government's approach but we've worked with them, we've facilitated it and we won't stand in the way.

We do have significant concerns, given the fact that the government has been too slow and too modest in their stimulus packages and in their responses to the health crisis. I won't go into the details, but, for example, the wage subsidy is not a job guarantee. There is not a single guarantee that any business that receives that measure will be required to hold onto staff. At best it supports the cash flow of those businesses, and that is important. That is absolutely vital, but there is no guarantee that they will keep on a single staff member while accessing the scheme. Even if they do, what is the effective subsidy? The effective subsidy, given the average income tax paid by an Australian, is about 25 per cent. So this measure is a 25 per cent wage subsidy at best when you compare it to the 80 per cent tax subsidy that the Johnson conservative government in the United Kingdom has implemented. So, I have, like my Labor colleagues, huge concerns about that aspect of the legislation.

I also have huge concerns around the jobseeker payment and the nature of the administration of that. I applaud the fact that they've waived the waiting period. I applaud the fact that they've waived the liquid assets test so people don't have to run down their assets before accessing it, but they have not waived the spousal income test. That is of huge concern. That means that you could have two workers on about $48,000 a year and, when one loses their job because of the coronavirus, they are precluded from getting a single cent in government assistance because their partner still earns $48,000 a year. It is well below the average income—it's even below the median income. Let me repeat that: we could have a family, a couple, that has gone from, say, $100,000 a year to $48,000 a year—a cut in income of well over half; dire circumstances—but the way in which this payment is constructed means they will not receive a single cent of government assistance. That is a crime that will massively reduce the circumstances of those couples and those families. It is of huge concern and it must be rectified. We must urgently rectify that if this jobseeker payment is to have the outcome that is desired, which is to help families, help couples and help individuals when they lose their job because of the coronavirus.

We've also seen issues around Centrelink. We've seen the 5,000 cut to staff over the last few years leading to massive issues for people accessing the payments. We've seen very long queues at my local Centrelink at Charlestown—that's been reported to me. We have seen the myGov web site crash because this government didn't...
have the foresight to invest in the appropriate infrastructure. In fact, we had this ridiculous situation where, before question time, the Minister for Government Services was claiming there was a cyberattack. But in question time we heard: 'No, the website crashed because they had 95,000 people trying to get onto a website designed to have 50,000 people at most'. That's a huge concern—the failure to prepare for this—and the implications are that people are queuing up shoulder to shoulder, ignoring self-distancing requirements, to access these payments that they desperately need.

I'll turn briefly to my portfolio responsibilities as the shadow minister for international development and the Pacific. I should report to the House that, sadly, there are 105 cases reported in the Pacific so far and one death. Other nations in this region have made very significant moves. The government of Papua New Guinea has declared a state of emergency. We have movement restrictions in New Caledonia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Hawaii, Samoa, the Marshall Islands, Tonga, the Solomon Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia. These are extreme moves, particularly from nations who are dependent, generally, on two industries: commercial fishing, which has been devastated by climate change, and tourism. We're going to be doing it tough over the next year—our tourism industry will be decimated—but we are in the relatively fortunate position that we do not rely solely on tourism for our national economy. These Pacific islands are exposed massivly because of this. They urgently need more health assistance. I do applaud the government's announcements around providing specific coronavirus assistance to Pacific island nations. But the government does need to explain and justify the 10 per cent cut to health assistance to the Pacific region that they've imposed over the last five years. Our Pacific friends and neighbours are dealing with this crisis from the position where Australian health assistance has been cut by 10 per cent. In some nations it has been much more extreme. The health assistance to Fiji has been cut by 22 per cent, Samoa by 36 per cent, Solomon Islands by 13 per cent and Tuvalu by a massive 75 per cent. This is a very unfortunate starting position for government assistance to these Pacific nations.

We also have to give thought to how we support these nations as they recover from the pandemic. These nations will be looking at who they will partner with for this recovery. We're already seeing that health and infrastructure assistance from other nations is on the rise. For example, 10 Pacific island nations have already signed Belt and Road deals with China. So Australia does need to give due consideration to how we assist our neighbours in the recovery phase, once we get through the crisis.

In my time remaining, I want to turn to the health aspects of this crisis. I want to begin by noting that I have one of the oldest electorates by age in the Commonwealth. We know the coronavirus, while it does impact on young and middle-aged people, will have a disproportionate impact on the more senior Australians. In fact, the fatality rate, I believe, worldwide for those over the age of 70 is eight per cent, and it climbs even higher as you look at 80-year-olds and 90-year-olds. For the electorate of Shortland, we are massively exposed to the health implications of this crisis. That is why it is so important that governments clearly communicate on what is required. That is why it's so clearly important that governments respond to the best health advice possible and, when in doubt, act early. Do not procrastinate. When in doubt, act early. I want to let every person in Shortland know that my thoughts are with them. My electorate office remains open to support them in every possible way, and if there's anything I or my office can do, please give my office a call or email me.

I now want to turn to the impact on the health workforce, because this is a very significant employer in my electorate. I have 3,000 people in my electorate who work in hospitals. I also have another 3,000 healthcare workers who work in non-hospital situations. So the seat of Shortland is at the heart of the workforce issues. I applaud the government's changed policy around telehealth. That is overdue. We need to provide universal access to telehealth, we need to allow GPs to provide telehealth services from home, and we need to make sure that the financial base for general practices is maintained. It would be an absolute travesty—and it would undermine recovery from this crisis—if we were to see swaths of general practitioners go under because of this crisis. So the government needs to look closely at what it's announced so far to make sure that they support the financial health of our general practitioners.

I will turn now to the hospital environment. I have a very large public hospital in my electorate, Belmont Hospital, I have two very large private hospitals in Warners Bay and Lake Macquarie, and I have the John Hunter Hospital one kilometre from my northern boundary. In fact, I used to represent the John Hunter Hospital when I was the member for Charlton. It is the only tertiary level hospital between Sydney and Brisbane. It has, depending on how you measure it, the busiest or second-busiest emergency department in New South Wales. It is on the frontline of this crisis, and its workforce, the healthcare workers at all the hospitals I mentioned—but, in particular, the John Hunter—will bear the brunt of the health aspects of the COVID-19 outbreak. We only have to look at what has occurred in Italy, where nine per cent of cases of coronavirus were health workers. Let me repeat that: nine per cent of total coronavirus infections in Italy were healthcare workers.
I fear we may see something similar in Australia. We must ensure that we have adequate PPE—personal protective equipment—available for our health workforce. And we're already seeing reports of not enough equipment. I have heard reports that hand sanitiser at the John Hunter is clinically unavailable. It is unavailable and they're unable to use it. I've heard reports around nursing homes and other hospitals that PPE, such as masks, is not available. This is something where the federal and state governments have already, clearly, failed. We must rectify this.

I've got the privilege of being married to a nurse who, until about six months ago, worked at the John Hunter Hospital in a very intense clinical environment. So I know, and I'm seeing on my Facebook now the worry, concern and passion for their patients that the nursing and medical staff at the John Hunter and other hospitals are experiencing right now. We must do more to support them. They are on the frontline of this crisis. This is a crisis that is only going to get worse, and the workforce will bear the brunt. At best, these workers will not see their families for months. I know of nurses and doctors who have made arrangements to live with other healthcare workers and not expose their families to the coronavirus. The best-case scenario for these workers is that they won't see their families for months. They are going to be working extremely long hours. Some of them will be infected. Let me repeat that: some of them will be infected while doing their jobs at these hospitals. And without adequate personal protective equipment we are condemning doctors and nurses to die from this virus. And I don't say that lightly.

I'm aware of the need not to sensationalise this debate. I'm aware of the need to take a rational, sensible and level-headed approach to this. But it is a fact that, without adequate personal protective equipment, doctors and nurses will die due to treating patients who are suffering from the coronavirus. And that's something I urge everyone in this place and state parliaments to reflect on. That is not to fling mud. That is not to accuse people of not doing their job, but that is a responsibility every member of this parliament and every member of state parliaments bears on their shoulders. If we do not do our job properly, if we do not do our job with utmost care and responsibility, and if we do not respond in the fastest possible fashion, doctors and nurses will die. Doctors and nurses will die unnecessarily and tragically, if we don't do our job. So, that is my message to people listening. That is my message to my colleagues in this place.

We must fight this crisis. We must pass this stimulus package. We must pass the next stimulus package and the one after that, if that proves necessary. We must make sure that those stimulus packages work, that they're aimed at the right people and they help those people get through this economic crisis. But, primarily, this is a health crisis, and we must make sure that we limit the spread of this contagion, which we support the patients and we make sure that as few as possible get infected—and as few as possible of the workers looking after them are exposed to this deadly virus.

**Dr FREELANDER** (Macarthur) (15:33): I rise to speak on the COVID-19—or novel coronavirus—health crisis. I know I speak, really, for everyone in the House: we're all worried about this. We're all stressed about it as, indeed, is the Australian population—in fact, the world population. This is not a time for politics. It's not a time to nitpick. It's not a time to be churlish. Whenever I am stressed and worried, I return to some of my old friends. It's important to understand that the world has been through this, or a similar crisis, before and we've survived; we've come out of it. And we will, and indeed, come out of this.

Two of my old friends are Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr John Watson. In a Sherlock Holmes *His Last Bow* story, written in 1914, Holmes says to Watson:

"There's an east wind coming, Watson."

And Watson looks at him and says:

"I think not, Holmes. It is very warm."

Then Holmes says:

"Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. ..."

That's what will happen now. This is a crisis. This is a time when we're all worried, and we all need to work together as a team.

I've worked as a doctor since 1978. I started my private practice in Campbelltown in Camden in 1984, at the time of the HIV-AIDS crisis. I've seen the other viral health emergencies arise, with SARS and MERS, and we've gotten through them. But this is a bigger emergency, a bigger crisis. It's the most significant health emergency for my generation and for several generations of doctors before me. We are facing an impending health disaster and we must all work together to get through it. We must face it together.
Some of our health responses have been slow and not comprehensive enough—my views on the social-distancing policies are well-known. But now is a time that we must all act together, with a sense of urgency, and deal with this in a spirit of community that will benefit us all. It's not a time to blame people. It's a time to explain to people. It's a time to bring people with us. For example, we should not be condemning young people for wanting to have a good time. They've been told for months now that this virus is very mild in young people, so of course they want to go out and have a good time. They need to have explained to them the importance of not spreading the virus, and why we are doing our social-distancing policies.

In the same way, I completely understand why people are panicking and panic-buying. They're stressed, they're worried, and the one thing they can control is providing enough food for themselves and their families. So, of course many people are panic-buying. There is absolutely no need to do it. We need to explain that to people, but we shouldn't condemn them for their behaviour.

All of my friends and relatives who work in the health system are working as one to try to get us through this. I say to them all: thank you for your service. I know how hard everyone has been working to prepare. I have great confidence in my colleagues, the wardsmen, the ward clerks, the ambos, the nurses, the administrators and the doctors. They will provide us with the best care possible. I'd like to thank the New South Wales health minister, the Hon Brad Hazzard, and New South Wales Chief Health Officer, Dr Kerry Chant, for the work they've done to prepare us. Locally, I'd like to thank the CEO of South Western Sydney Local Health District, Amanda Larkin, for the work she has done to help prepare. Thanks to Alison Derrett, the head of our hospital service in Campbelltown, for the work she's done to prepare our hospital, and to the Director of Medical Services, Selappa Prahalath, for the work that he's done to prepare us. We need to slow the rapidity of spread of this virus, and it's vital. Social-distancing policies need to be strict and they need to be hard. People will suffer—I know that. There's much pain. But, together, we will get through this.

I understand why we must get through this together. At the end of this crisis our society will be there, strong and flourishing. I'm sure of that. I thank everyone for the support they've given in these really trying times for all of us. I'm gratified by the unity of purpose the entire parliament has given to this. We will get through it. Thank you.

**Dr HAINES** (Indi) (15:39): Just seven weeks ago, I rose in this place to commemorate what I described at the time as a summer that has visited grief upon this nation. The bushfires seem like a lifetime ago now, but it was only weeks ago that the nation was brought to a standstill by that disaster. Incredibly, we are now in the midst of another national crisis. In my many years as a nurse and a midwife, I've been in life-and-death situations, and I know that gut-wrenching feeling when a birth starts to go wrong or an ambulance arrives at the emergency department with a critically ill car-crash victim. I know that, to get through moments where life itself hangs in the balance, you need to muster your composure, do what needs to be done, work as a team and listen to the experts. Australia as a nation is now in such a situation.

The global effort to develop a vaccine is uniting scientists in an urgent shared purpose, and we too as a nation must unite in an urgent and shared purpose to slow the spread. But what began as a health crisis is now a global economic crisis. An already fragile economy is about to get hit for six. In my electorate of Indi right now, my office is inundated with calls, as I'm sure every MP in this House is inundated with calls. The calls in my electorate are coming from people from a bushfire affected electorate.

The bills that are before us—the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 and related bills—are a sensible and necessary intervention to protect the economy. Of course they are not perfect, and the government must be prepared to listen and respond when there's more that we need to do, or when there's a better approach or a different opinion that needs to be considered. We often speak about the economy as if it's a distinct entity, but it's about people's lives, about their livelihoods, and about feeding their families and housing them. It's about the decisions that they make. The measures announced to date are overwhelmingly targeted at business and the most vulnerable in our community. This is a good thing. It is as it should be.

But today I want to highlight the needs of some particularly vulnerable members of our community, and especially those in my electorate of Indi. Many regional communities are facing a double whammy of bushfires and now COVID-19. For many of us, the bushfires were a gut-punch. The economic rebuild became about tourism events and visiting small businesses with our empty eskies. All those plans are now gone—the Man from Snowy River Bush Festival in Corryong, the Beechworth Golden Horseshoes Festival, the High Country Women’s Cycling Festival in Bright and the Tawonga CFA thankyou picnic, to name but some. Right across the nation, there are similar events.

This is an unparalleled natural disaster followed by a once-in-a-century pandemic. For bushfire affected communities, this health crisis comes at the worst possible time. We cannot forget these communities. Because
COVID-19 compounds the damage of the bushfires, the bushfire recovery must then accelerate, not slow down. As the Prime Minister said today, more support will come over the next weeks and months. He has said that, given the circumstances, we need to change the rules for this period, and so we need this same approach for bushfire recovery.

I hear across my electorate that bushfire grants to small businesses, farmers and individuals are not getting out to them because of the burden of paperwork and bureaucracy. Today the government introduced bills for unconditional cash transfers to all small businesses in Australia, with no paperwork. Let's contrast this with the requirements for obtaining bushfire support. These people and businesses are starting well behind scratch in this COVID-19 crisis. The burden of paperwork and difficult eligibility criteria must stop, and I know that collaboratively we can work to make it stop. Let's make it a national goal to find a job for anybody who needs one. Anyone who loses a job to COVID-19 or the bushfires should rapidly be retrained to support the health system or our critical infrastructure and services at this time of crisis.

I share the concerns of many in this House that the measures are not being implemented quickly enough. The coronavirus supplement won't be available until 27 April. In our electorate offices, we know that it's needed right now. Let's provide direct grants to artists and creatives around the country. They are often among the first to join the Centrelink queues, as by necessity they run multiple part-time and casual jobs. We need these people to help us come through this and to bring us together as only art and culture can. The Prime Minister talks about building a bridge to life on the other side of this virus; we need to have a national conversation about what life on the other side actually looks like.

We are now steeling ourselves for job losses on a huge scale. The Prime Minister today encouraged businesses that stand down employees to commit to standing them up on the other side. This 'unwritten contract', as the Prime Minister described it, is not enough. Our workers need more security than an unwritten contract.

This year has taught us that we are not immune from threats to our way of life. Going forwards, we cannot forget that and we must invest our money accordingly. The impact of social distancing measures for six months will take a huge toll on people's mental health, and in bushfire affected electorates such as mine that mental health is already perilously fragile. A post COVID-19 world must take adequate investment in mental health seriously. It needs to be serious, serious investment, so that we are stronger when the next crisis hits, and, of course, it will hit.

Moreover, the economic and social precarity of so many Australians has been thrown into stark relief. My constituents have written to me about the realities of lockdowns for women experiencing family violence; for vulnerable children dependent on counselling and material support through their school or service provider; for people unable to afford internet connection or mobile phones and how extra isolated they will be; and for people with disabilities or elderly people who rely on others for the fundamental supports to their daily living. We cannot forget them and the support they need through this crisis. I welcome the government's support of the aviation industry. My electorate is serviced by Regional Express Airlines through the airport in Albury alongside Qantas and Virgin, and these airlines are critical to our community.

At the start of January, I wrote that the fire season stretched before us as a perilous path we have no choice but to walk. In those long, hot days of our black summer, when it felt like half the country was on fire, it was hard to imagine life on the other side. But the rains came, and our skies are now clear. The rebuild is just beginning. It is not fast enough, but it is beginning, and we need to hold on to this idea now as we head into another crisis that is completely different. It too will test our resolve, but in different ways, and it will touch all of us—make no mistake about that.

Just as we honoured our emergency services fighting the fires, I want to honour our doctors, our nurses, our allied health professionals and those who support them, who are now preparing for the greatest challenge they will ever face. And amongst them are my own daughter, my nephews and my nieces, and my very dear friends, who I have spent more than three decades working with. I salute all of them, and all of those who I do not know, because this is a test of their bravery and their professionalism. I know they are up to the task. I thank too our biomedical researchers and those in essential support services, whether they're in food, groceries, logistics, public service, social service. To our teachers: thank you. You are all being called upon to do more and more.

It's a mighty job that's in front of us, but we will come out the other side of this pandemic. How we will come out, though, will be determined by some of the thinking, some of the courage, the cooperation and the innovation in the decisions that we make here in this place. Let them be wise ones. Let's make those decisions wise ones. Let them be ones that preserve us for now but ones that take us to a stronger future, a future that has a place for every single one of us in this nation.

Ms SHARKIE (Mayo) (15:48): We are living in extraordinary circumstances and at a time of tremendous concern for many in our communities. Not in the living memory of many, if any, Australians have we experienced...
such a health crisis and an economic crisis in one event. Time is of the essence, and I will not take up too much time of this House, but I think it's important that I briefly speak as a member of the crossbench and also as the only member of Centre Alliance to speak on this bill, both here and in the other place.

I would first like to commend to the government. This is an enormous package of legislation pulled together in a short time. It is comprehensive in outlook. I would also like to mention the government's fact sheets on the website, www.Treasury.gov.au/coronavirus. They are detailed and in a clear format, outlining assistance available for individuals, families, retirees and self-funded retirees, and veterans. The website also provides information on early access to limited superannuation, cash flow assistance for small businesses, temporary financial relief for distressed businesses, support for small-business investment and the increase and expansion of the instant tax write-off. I know many people are discovering they no longer have employment, and this is crushing. Many businesses are operating differently or are required to close their doors. It is my hope that, with the support package available, the closure of those doors will indeed be a temporary measure.

Sadly, every one of us will be impacted by coronavirus in some way. As my colleague Senator Stirling Griff said in the other place this morning, 'If we stick together, and with the right support, we will get through this.' We know that there is an extra $22 billion in the supply bills for government to spend as they deem necessary in the coming months. This is, I believe, a sensible measure. As we close borders in many states, returning here to allow government to release more funds will not be an easy thing to arrange. Transparency on this spending, however, is important.

I would like to mention that where I think there is a gap in support that needs to be addressed is in community wellbeing assistance. Arriving here last night I had the opportunity to chat to the former member for Indi, Cathy McGowan. Perhaps it is because we are both regional women, but our conversation immediately went to our concerns on how we can lift up our regional communities. Who will keep people connected? When we look at those who already do this, those who are best providing support to those based in our community, the answer, I believe, is simple: it is local government. So I would urge the government to again look at providing financial assistance to our local governments. I know my regional local governments do extraordinary community work. It worked so well with drought funding, where there was $1 million provided to each local government area, and more recently with bushfire assistance, with funding again directly provided to local government. Like the member for Indi's area, my community has also experienced huge devastation over summer and coronavirus is just compounding our loss and devastation.

Local government know who are vulnerable and isolated and they work closely with small NGOs if they are not providing the service delivery themselves, such as social wellbeing programs. I'm deeply concerned that, without the community wellbeing support that will need to be delivered in different ways than it currently is, we will lose more people to mental health issues, exacerbated by loneliness and isolation, than potentially to coronavirus. The singing on the balconies that we saw from Italy, that lifted everyone's spirits and built solidarity and camaraderie, was driven by their local government network. We need to support ours to create similar initiatives.

We have been through so much—bushfires, on the back of drought. So I have a call to action for my Mayo community: we all need to do random acts of kindness. Make phone calls to the elderly. Join a group on Facebook. There's one that I know of in our community called Caremongering Adelaide Hills. These Facebook groups are spreading all across our community. This will be what will get us through. Assist an elderly person over the phone on how they can make Facebook calls and how they can talk to each other. Talk to them about Zoom. Get them on Facebook or other social media platforms, where they can share and connect and still have videoconferencing calls with their grandchild who they can't see at the moment.

I'd like to say thank you to our healthcare workers, the doctors, the nurses, the teachers, the childcare workers, the supermarket workers, the truck drivers and the bus drivers. They are all working so hard in our community. They are all keeping Australia going, and we are all indebted to them for their service. And can I ask all Australians to please be kind to the Centrelink operators—the people who answer your phone calls when you're ringing them and when you're calling your bank. Also, I'd like to give a shout-out to my staff. The phone calls started very early this morning, as I'm sure they have in every member's office. We understand many people are deeply, deeply stressed, and we want to help every one of you. But, please, just remember they are humans too. I know my staff are doing an extraordinary job.

I'd also like to make the point that we need to care for our young people. While young people may not be as susceptible from a health perspective as older people are to coronavirus, and certainly to complications from coronavirus, they are vulnerable in other ways. I'm particularly concerned about young people and disruption to their education, whether that be high school or university. They are incredibly vulnerable in their mental health,
and we need to make sure that we can still support them. They are social beings, and we need to make sure that they are with us for generations.

As a student of history, I’ve recently reflected on how decision-makers and the community responded to the Spanish flu pandemic between 1918 and December 1920. It was actually called the Spanish influenza because Spain was the only country that was reporting on the deaths and giving information. It actually started in Kansas. In another century, students will judge us on the decisions we make today. In the near future, we will be judged on how we support each other and our most vulnerable. It is my great hope that we will be looked upon in a favourable light. We must remember, at every turn, that we are a community and we are all in this together. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms STEGGALL (Warringah) (15:56): I commend the government for the measures being taken in such haste that are before the House today. There is no blueprint on how to deal with a crisis of this scale. We must all work together in finding solutions. I urge the government to consult broadly and be inclusive in its decision-making. This is not a time for party partisanship, but a time to come together to find the solutions. Many are worried about the health risk to themselves and to their loved ones. They fear losing their jobs, having hours scaled back, seeing family businesses fold. The measures in this package of bills will assist in alleviating some of the financial hardship. However, I urge the government: if there are further measures being considered, please do not delay.

Regarding sole traders and casuals, in Warringah we have 22.8 per cent of the workforce as casual. That's approximately 22,500 people. In Australia as a whole, non-employing businesses, or sole traders, account for 62.8 per cent of all businesses. Many of these will be in dire circumstances well before 28 April, when they will receive government assistance under these bills. I urge the government to accelerate delivery of support, where possible, to these individuals.

I’m concerned about those in the arts and entertainment industry—those musicians, actors, artists and performers who have brought so much joy to our communities: the drama, the delight and the unity over the years. During the recent bushfires, it was the arts and entertainment community that were leaders in stepping forward to contribute their time and skills to help those in need. They now need us, and I encourage the government to implement policy and programs to assist this group. Other areas are also going to be decimated, like the fitness industry, who play a huge part in the ultimate health outcomes of our nation, and professional sports, all the way down to grassroots-level sports. They will also need help.

Most of the measures introduced are dependent upon businesses being open and trading, therefore keeping workers employed. I ask the government to consider additional measures, like direct capped wage subsidies for employees in businesses that are closed, as currently endorsed by the UK, Germany and New Zealand. Healthcare and all essential service workers need special consideration—and the rest of the community—as they continue to keep Australia running.

Those with disabilities need more support too. NDIS participants need services to ensure that food is delivered to them, that their plans are enhanced to accommodate the additional expenditure and that they are prioritised for personal protective equipment. As more and more Australians are physically isolated, there will be a growing demand upon community services, charities and mental health services. Please ensure these vital services receive additional resources and funding.

I also wish to raise the issue of travellers, of Australians stranded overseas. My office has been approached by numerous families and friends extremely concerned for their loved ones that are stranded on ships. They’re stuck in Peru, in Singapore, in Spain, all trying to get home. DFAT staff are working incredibly hard in unbelievable circumstances trying to make sure this happens. I ask the government to get our fellow Australians home safely by whatever means necessary.

With regard to messaging and communication, it's concerning that there are still some in the media who are not reflecting the urgency and seriousness of this crisis. This is negligent and unacceptable and should be called out by the government. The government needs to be clearer with its messaging. This crisis is moving rapidly. Australians are confused and anxious. Clarity and consistency are needed. Australians want the facts. We need to do better on communication.

The most important thing to say is thank you to the teachers, the scientists, the cleaners, the people on production lines and delivery services, the bus drivers, the Centrelink staff, the mental health workers and, of course, all the health professionals and everyone who is working diligently to keep Australia going. Thank you for putting yourselves at risk but continuing on. But I do urge the government to encourage everyone else, if they are able to, to work from home or permit their staff to work from home, please. It's time for the government to encourage and urge everyone who can to work from home. The more we minimise how many people are out and about, the more chance we have to flatten the curve.
We were warned weeks ago that this threat was coming. We saw what happened in other countries. So many are horrified to see the escalation of the health crisis in Italy and Spain. We must do everything possible to avoid that path here in Australia. These are complicated and confusing times. No-one has all the answers, but it is incumbent upon us in this place to do our very best to ensure that all Australians are taken care of. Every life lost to coronavirus will be one too many.

Finally, I call on everyone. Each and every one of you has a role to play. You can impact the outcome of this crisis by being informed and by following the hygiene recommendations—and, please, please, stay home unless absolutely necessary. Thank you.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (16:03): We are living through a critical moment in our country's history and in the history of the world. We are facing an invisible enemy that requires every one of us to change how we live and what we do. It's turning our economy upside down and it threatens to supercharge the enormous structural inequalities and economic problems that we're already living with. It looks like many thousands of people are going to die. Our economy will go into recession and possibly a depression. Hundreds of thousands of people are going to join the unemployment line, and many have already. Our social fabric risks being torn apart.

Now, more than ever, this parliament, all political parties and our country's leaders must remember that the first duty of government—just like a doctor's—is to protect lives. If we're to pull through and protect as many lives as possible, it will be in large part thanks to our public health system; because we listened to experts and scientists; and because we put human life ahead of a budget surplus. But our world-class public health workforce is telling us they may soon be overwhelmed by the coronavirus, and nowhere is this clearer than in the state of our intensive care beds. The Deputy Chief Medical Officer has flagged that Australia is facing, possibly, up to 150,000 deaths in the worse-case scenario, and some analysts suggest at present infection rates we may run out of intensive care beds just for the worse cases of coronavirus by early April—and this assumes no other demand from heart attacks or car crashes. If we end up on a trajectory like that of other nations, our intensive care facilities will not be able to cope.

Medical experts have warned that the number of intensive care beds needs to at least double if we're even to have a chance of managing this epidemic, and the Prime Minister must urgently detail a plan to at least double the number of ICUs, if not much more. As we've seen in Italy, access to an ICU will literally determine who lives and who dies. We also want to see an undertaking that beds and medical equipment in the private health system will be made available to everyone as part of the public health system so that the neediest get intensive care hospital beds, not just the wealthiest. We also need to hear more detail of the government's plan to secure the supply of ventilators and other medical equipment that's in short supply. If we're at the back of the global queue for acquiring ventilating medical equipment, then we must start manufacturing them right here ourselves. We need a plan to ensure that we do not let people die from the imminent danger of overloaded hospitals.

At this moment, we need to be able to trust our leaders and our institutions because lives depend on it. We are blessed to still have so many scientists and experts who will speak out fearlessly in the public interest on the basis of facts and evidence, and we are lucky that some leaders will listen to them. But it's at moments like this that we start to see the cost of what happens when politicians erode trust for their own narrow purposes. Every time science is described as a hoax or a minister forges a document or public services are attacked and privatised or a budget surplus is prioritised over looking after each other, we eat away the very foundation of trust that is needed to get through crises like these. As a result, our collective anxiety is turned up. And it's not helped by mixed messages about whether you can shake hands or go to the football. Although there has been terrible behaviour, like the stockpiling of essentials which leaves too many people behind, people are generally doing their best to work out what they should do, sifting through inconsistent and late messages from political leaders. The Prime Minister has no right to criticise people who are just trying to do their best to decipher inconsistent and unclear messages.

People are often out ahead of the government. People understand we are facing a health crisis the likes of which they've never lived through, so many people are rising to face the crisis upon us. I want to particularly thank our incredible allied health workers for their service at the forefront of this crisis. I want to thank the teachers and childcare workers who are educating our kid. And I want to thank the thousands of supermarket workers who are keeping our shelves stocked and looking out for the most vulnerable. These supermarket workers have faced years of attacks on their rights and now they are at the frontline of the fight providing a truly essential service. I also thank everyday people across the country who are doing their bit to flatten the curve. Many are going above and beyond what the government is asking. On the weekend, I took my daughter to a birthday party online as another family shifted their five-year-old's party to what is going to be, I'm sure, one of the first of many online children's birthday parties. I want to thank the people who are leafleting their neighbours offering support
and organising deliveries of care packages. It's truly heartening, and I thank you all. I call on our leaders to match the leadership of everyday Australians and provide more transparent and consistent advice in this time of crisis. Confusion breeds anxiety, but now is the time that we need clarity.

I said at the start our priority here must be to protect life. To protect life, we have to have a clear-eyed look at the multiple threats that we are facing. As we attempt to flatten out the curve of the coronavirus cases, we must remember that there are other exponential curves that threaten to overwhelm us, and the climate emergency is only one of them. We still have to flatten the emissions curve as well as the corona curve. Poverty, inequality and economic depression all kill too. Economic misery is also a destroyer of people's physical and mental health. The destruction of our biosphere is literally wrecking the fabric that underpins our life as a species.

With coronavirus we are all about to go through a kind of hell that we wouldn't wish on anyone, so it's incumbent on us to fight just as hard against any other threat to life that is around the corner and the threats that the coronavirus will multiply. We need government action to tackle this health and economic crisis in a way that will also set us on a path to dealing with these other crises as well. If we don't, we will be back here again and again and lives will be at threat. At this moment, all of us need to be able to look every person in this country in the eye, whoever they are, and say, 'We will not leave you behind.' This has to be a response not just to keep big corporations going but for everyone on a minimum wage or who doesn't have a job; not just for people with top-shelf private health insurance but for everyone in this country. Just last week, my office assisted two or three women who are pregnant, who are going to give birth in the next few months and who do not have homes. Imagine, at the best of times, giving birth while you're homeless, and then imagine doing it as the coronavirus crisis is beating down on us. There are people that we must reach out to and look after. It is the government's responsibility to make sure no-one is left behind.

Government priorities in the years leading up to this moment have been about budget savings from public services instead of advancing the wellbeing of people, but now the government have thrown out the economic rule book to deal with this crisis, and I applaud them for that. What we're finding out is that the things that will get us through this crisis are the very things that for 30 years we've been hearing are impossible—like a strong and expanded public health system, governments acting urgently by relying on scientific advice, and human life and wellbeing put ahead of a budget surplus. It will be public trust in our public institutions that will get us through this. We are all in this together. Everyone, from all walks of life, including the Prime Minister, has been saying this, and it is absolutely right. Let's make sure that our economic system reflects this reality so that we no longer put lives at risk and we don't leave anyone behind again—not people living with disabilities, not people living in housing stress, not First Nations people, no-one.

There is a need to stimulate the economy because we are heading towards, certainly, a recession and, potentially, a depression. The Greens want to do everything we possibly can to make sure that does not happen. It is our job today to pass a package of bills that will not only stimulate our economy but make sure no-one is left behind. This package of bills is a start, but right now I'm extremely concerned that it leaves behind students, people on the disability support pension and carers, who will be unable to access the additional COVID-19 stimulus payment. It is simply callous to exclude from this extra payment students and DSP recipients, many of whom have just lost the casual shifts they were relying on to make ends meet. And there is nothing in this package for people with disabilities who are reliant on a care workforce—which involves a great deal of trust—that needs protection. We have still not suspended the mutual obligation requirements fully and across the board, something that could increase the risk of this virus spreading.

We want to see more support for renters and those experiencing homelessness, with rent holidays and a ban on evictions. And we're concerned that some of the sectors hardest hit in this crisis—in particular, arts and culture, tourism and hospitality—still don't have the necessary package to ensure they can survive the coming months. We're worried that the changes to superannuation won't protect people in retirement and could further entrench the gender pay gap. We won't stand in the way of this package passing, but we're committed to filling in the gaps and making sure no-one is left behind.

We're pleased to see that the government have listened to our concerns, which we've raised directly with them over the past couple of weeks, about the inadequate rate of Newstart and the failure to extend the original stimulus package to the not-for-profit sector. I'm pleased the government have agreed to address both those matters that have been raised by the Greens. Just as they listened to our proposals on Newstart and extending the package to the not-for-profit sector, they should listen to the Greens and other people about the people and sectors that are being left behind by this package. Outside of those health workers dealing directly with COVID-19 infections, one group who are vulnerable right now are the 37 per cent of our workforce who have no paid leave. Casual and gig economy workers have been forgotten. They'll get support only when they sign up with Centrelink. They'll have to wait a long time for that payment, and, when it comes, it won't necessarily cover their losses. It's the same for...
those workers who were looking forward to gigs at festivals and events over the coming months, only to find themselves cut adrift.

But there is a bigger problem. The lion's share of this stimulus package is going to banks and businesses, and there is no requirement that the money find its way to the workers and people who need it. Taxpayer money should be used to bail out people, not just corporations. Seven hundred and fifteen million dollars has been gifted to the airlines to service their debt, for example; they say thanks and, in the next breath, stand down 20,000 staff. All this money for business needs to come with a guarantee that businesses will keep their staff on board while we are in lockdown. We need wage guarantees and job guarantees to be the strings attached to this. They've managed to do it in the UK. I don't find myself agreeing with Boris Johnson on many matters, but, if Boris Johnson can say, 'We can guarantee 80 per cent of wages to ensure people remain employed,' yet the government can find only 15 to 20 per cent, then I hope they consider scaling up the package over the coming weeks. If we can keep people employed now, that is one less job we are going to have to create when this crisis is over.

This morning the Prime Minister talked about the Great Depression. The original New Deal was a government-led program in the United States that supported people, created jobs where they were needed and encouraged businesses to help the government pull the country out of the crisis of the Great Depression. It was a spectacular success and led us to what is now seen as the golden age of equality with the lowest-ever rates of wealth disparity.

When I first became Leader of the Australian Greens, I talked about how we needed a Green New Deal to solve the three challenges of a jobs crisis, economic inequality and the climate emergency—a program of government action and investment at a time when it has never been cheaper for government to borrow to invest in a clean society and a caring economy. The reality of the coronavirus only reinforces the need for such action. Now we need it more than ever because the kinds of shortages that we are seeing now, the distress people are living through and the threats to life we are witnessing will be exacerbated if we don't get the other crises under control as well.

This time of restriction and anxiety that we are all living through will get worse, unless we fight the climate crises and the inequality crisis as well. I don't want my kids to have to live through this kind of fear and threat to life but, unless we respond to this terrible threat by getting all the terrible threats under control, that is what is going to happen to our children. That is why we need not just a new deal depression-era response as the Prime Minister was indicating but a Green New Deal to tackle the coronavirus crisis right now but also the other crises hammering our life in public health. I suspect this will be only the first of several rounds of economic stimulus that the government brings to parliament for approval.

The Greens call to the government is constructive and simple. You've already listened to us in implementing a couple of measures and now go the next step. Implement a Green New Deal. Help people, not just corporations. Fund public services, create jobs that society needs and that the market hasn't yet provided. Invest in the infrastructure that we need to avoid the rolling series of crises that we are on track for as we tackle the immediate priority of the deadly coronavirus. This is our opportunity to make sure no-one is left behind and that we tackle the immediate threats by creating a society that we can all be proud of.

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (16:17): Firstly, I want to thank all of the members who have contributed to this debate and contributed in such a fine way. As the Treasurer outlined, these are unprecedented times. Australia's not faced a crisis like this before, and strong and decisive action is required to protect Australians and the economy from the coronavirus. The measures contained in the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020 and the other bills in this package provide critical support for the Australian economy to protect jobs and put Australia in the best possible position to bounce back strongly after this crisis. The measures include additional household income to give a boost to those that need it most and business support that will help see businesses through this tough time and keep more people in jobs.

Schedule 1 to the bill supports business investment by increasing the instant asset write-off threshold from $30,000 to $150,000 and expanding access to businesses with an aggregate annual turnover of less than $500 million, up from $50 million. The enhanced instant asset write-off applies to assets first used or installed ready for use in the period from 12 March 2020 to 30 June 2020.

Schedule 2 to the bill supports business investment by enabling businesses with aggregated turnover below $500 million to bring forward deductions of 50 per cent of the cost of certain assets that they have committed to purchase after 12 March 2020, if they are first used or installed by 30 June 2021.

Schedule 3 to the bill will support employers to manage cash flow challenges and help businesses and not-for-profits, including charities, importantly, retain their employees and keep operating by providing a cash flow boost payment. The bill will provide at least $20,000 and up to $100,000 to back eligible businesses and not-for-profits, again, including charities. This will benefit around 690,000 businesses employing around 7.8 million Australians.
Around 30,000 not-for-profits—again, important to note—will also benefit. These businesses will be able to keep selling their products, and not-for-profits will be able to keep delivering their important services to the Australian community.

Schedule 4 to the bill provides for the payment of the first economic support payment of $750 to approximately 6.6 million social security and veterans income support recipients, farm household allowance recipients, family tax benefit recipients and holders of a pensioner concession card, Commonwealth seniors health card or Commonwealth gold card. This schedule also provides for the payment of a second economic support payment of $750 to social security and veterans income support recipients, family tax benefit recipients and holders of a pensioner concession card, Commonwealth seniors health card or Commonwealth gold card who receive a qualifying payment or hold a qualifying concession card on 10 July 2020. This second payment will not be paid to a person who receives on 10 July 2020 the new coronavirus supplement established by this bill.

Schedule 5 to the bill amends the Biosecurity Act 2015 to ensure that Australia continues to have a world-class biosecurity system that is flexible and responsive to public health threats, such as those obviously posed by the coronavirus.

Schedule 6 to the bill makes amendments to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Regulations 2019 to temporarily waive the environmental management charge. This forms part of the $1 billion allocation the government has set aside to support regions and communities that have been disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of the coronavirus.

Schedule 7 to the bill provides assistance for up to 70,000 small businesses, including those using a group training organisation, to support the retention of around 117,000 apprentices and trainees. It also provides a $715 million relief package to help put Australia's aviation industry in the best possible position to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.

Schedule 8 to the bill creates a temporary instrument-making power in the Corporations Act 2001 for the Treasurer to grant time limited relief from regulatory requirements where these would interfere with the ability of companies to manage their business through the impacts of the coronavirus. This will be used judiciously and only in cases of absolute need.

Schedule 9 provides flexibility for approved childcare providers and families who depend on the childcare subsidy to manage absences and be able to continue to access care for their children.

Schedule 10 to the bill reduces the superannuation minimum drawdown rates for the 2019-20 income year by 50 per cent. These rates prescribe the amount that an individual in the retirement phase must withdraw from an account based pension or similar product, depending on their age.

Schedule 11 provides temporary financial support through a COVID-19 supplement of $550 per fortnight to new and existing income support recipients receiving a working age payment. It will also provide streamlined access and extended eligibility to income support for an initial period of six months from 14 April 2020. As has been noted, this may be extended. The schedule also creates a new category of crisis payment and delays commencement of the simplifying income reporting act for up to a year.

Schedule 12 to the bill provides a safety net for businesses to allow them to get through a temporary period of insolvency and to recover when economic growth picks up.

Schedule 13 to the bill establishes a new temporary compassionate ground of early release of superannuation, allowing impacted individuals to access up to $10,000 of their superannuation tax free in 2019-20 and up to a further $10,000 tax free in 2020-21. This initiative builds on existing provisions allowing early access to superannuation in the event of hardship or on compassionate grounds. It is estimated to put up to $27 billion of superannuation back into the pockets of working Australians.

Schedule 14 to the bill amends the Medicare Levy Act 1986 and the A New Tax New System (Medicare Levy Surcharge-Fringe Benefits) Act 1999 to increase the Medicare levy low-income thresholds for singles, families and seniors, and of course pensioners, in line with increases in CPI.

Schedule 15 to the bill amends the Charter of Budget Honesty to delay the next Intergenerational report from 2020 to mid-2021 to ensure that there is adequate time to produce long-term projections that are again based on robust budget estimates.

Schedule 16 to the bill, finally, will allow responsible ministers to defer sunsetting dates. Over the coming months this parliament will, quite rightly, be focused on responding to the needs of the Australian community. During this time, a number of acts passed by this parliament and a large number of legislative instruments are scheduled to sunset. Where an act or legislative instrument is scheduled to sunset on or before 15 October 2020,
the bill will allow the minister responsible for that act or instrument to defer the sunset day by up to six months. This will ensure that no gaps occur in our laws during this extraordinarily critical time.

At this time I would also like to table a correction to the explanatory memorandum, which corrects a typographical error. Finally, on behalf of the government I want to take this opportunity to thank the opposition, in particular, and, of course, members of the crossbench for their very constructive engagement on this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (16:25): Mr Speaker, I have a point of order that then becomes a question to you. Obviously, this is an unusual sitting and I wish to raise an issue that I have privately raised with you, and, in turn, raised with the Leader of the House, and the Leader of the House is of the same mind on the points I’m about to raise. We have an objective as a parliament to be showing the public that the rules that apply to them also apply to us. That means we have an objective to make sure we avoid common touch points and things like that. We are about to have a number of votes on a second-reading amendment. In the ordinary course we could go back to what we did 10 years ago, because the objective is to be able to conduct the vote without people having to swap from one side to the other. Given that I moved one of these amendments, that could mean I have a chance of getting it over the line. But if we work on the basis that the government will oppose all three of the second-reading amendments, which is a reasonable bet—it was only once we got them to support one—what I suggest is that, for the second-reading amendment that was moved by the member for Rankin, we do what we used to do 10 years ago, which is, instead of asking whether or not the amendment be agreed with, we use the old formulation: ‘that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question’. That means the government would vote on that side and we would vote on this side in support of the second reading amendment, and the crossbench has allocated seats, whichever way they want to go.

The problem this time—and I’m to blame for this—is that we have two amendments, one of them moved by me, that are amendments to the amendment and so the old formulation won't work for them.

The SPEAKER: That's right.

Mr BURKE: So, what I would put forward to you is whether or not, as Speaker, to suit the convenience of the House, you could put the question on those two amendments that the amendment be disagreed with and, in that way, the government, in voting 'yes', would be saying they don't think my amendment is very good at all and we, in voting 'no', would be supporting it. We will get the same outcome but be able to do it in a way that allows us to show that we are keeping to all the health and safety rules, not just as a public demonstration of it but also because it is just important that we do it. We all are about to return to different corners of the country and we want to make sure that all of those hygiene rules are followed to the letter.

The SPEAKER: I thank the Manager of Opposition Business. I had the opportunity to discuss this with him a couple of days ago—in fact, on Saturday, when we were here in the chamber making the preparations that you now are experiencing. I think that is a very good suggestion. What it essentially means, as the Manager of Opposition Business pointed out, is that normally you're asked whether you support a proposition, but essentially the reverse will be the case—you're being asked whether you disagree with a proposition. In that circumstance, as he said, we have an amendment on an amendment to the second reading amendment. We now have to deal with them in reverse order. We’ll deal with the amendment to the amendment and then we'll deal with the amendment to the second-reading amendment. I say this for the benefit of the crossbench: particularly on both of those, normally it would be that the amendment be agreed to. The government, in voting no, would cross. As the manager of opposition pointed out, instead, by voting with the ayes, the government would be disagreeing to the amendment. The opposition, in voting no, would be voting that they disagree with the proposition that is put before the House. Whilst I think we can predict which way government members will vote and which way opposition members will also vote, particularly for the crossbench, if any of you do need to move to the other side of the chamber, you would be the only ones doing so. There are allocated seats for you that have your names on them up the very back there and the word 'division' under your names. That's been arranged in the event that any of you need to move from one side to the other. I hope that's clear. It will mean that we don't have members crossing from one side to the other in close proximity and in that choke point down there, which is near the end of the horseshoe. What I'll do now is move through some of these procedures. We can expect to do the disagreed twice and then the other formulation that the Manager of Opposition Business outlined, and we'll go from there.

The original question was that these bills be read a second time, to which the honourable member for Rankin moved as an amendment that all words after ‘that’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The honourable member for Watson moved, as an amendment to that amendment, that certain words be added. The honourable member for Whitlam has moved, as an amendment to that amendment, that other words be added. So the immediate question would normally be that the amendment moved by the honourable member for Whitlam be agreed to, but, as I said, I'm proposing that, if there's no objection, I'll put the question in the form 'that the
amendment be disagreed to'. The immediate question is, that the amendment moved by the honourable member for Whitlam be disagreed to.

For the benefit of members who have just entered the chamber, we've determined to put questions, essentially, in an opposite way so that members don't need to move from one side of the chamber to the other. Normally I would be saying that the question before the House is that the amendment moved by the member for Whitlam be agreed to, but on this occasion, with the consent of the House, I'm moving that the amendment moved by the member for Whitlam be disagreed to, so the ayes will pass to the right of the chair, the noes to the left.

The House divided. [16:37]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ......................49
Noes ......................38
Majority ..................11

AYES
Allen, K
Andrews, KJ
Chester, D
Connelly, V
Evans, TM
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Haines, H
Howarth, LR
Joyce, BT
Laming, A
Ley, SP
Liu, G
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O’Brien, LS
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Sharkie, RCC
Simmonds, J
Sukkar, MS
van Manen, AJ
Wallace, AB
Wood, JP
Zimmerman, T

Andreas, KJ
Buchholz, S
Conaghan, PJ
Drum, DK (teller)
Falinski, JG
Flint, NJ (teller)
Gee, AR
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Kelly, C
Leeser, J
Littleproud, D
Martin, FB
McIntosh, MI
Morton, B
O’Brien, T
Porter, CC
Robert, SR
Sharma, DN
Steggall, Z
Tehan, DT
Vasta, RX
Wilson, TR
Young, T

NOES
Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Burke, AS
Chalmers, JE
Claydon, SC
Dick, MD
Freelander, MR
Giles, AJ
Gosling, LJ
Hill, JC
Jones, SP
King, CF
Marles, RD
O’Connor, BPJ
Payne, Afi
Shorten, WR
Stanley, AM (teller)
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Wilson, JH

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Butler, MC
Clare, JD
Conroy, PM
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gorman, P
Hayes, CP
Husie, EN
Khalil, P
Leigh, AK
Mulino, D
O’Neill, CE
Ryan, JC (teller)
Smith, DPB
Templeman, SR
Watts, TG
Zappia, A

Question agreed to.
The SPEAKER (16:41): If it suits the House, I will treat the amendment moved by the honourable member for Watson in the same way. The question now is that the amendment moved by the honourable member for Watson be disagreed to.

The House divided. [16:42]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ......................46
Noes ......................38
Majority ..................8

AYES

Allen, K
Andrews, KL
Chester, D
Connelly, V
Evans, TM
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Kelly, C
Leeser, J
Littleproud, D
Martin, FB
McIntosh, MI
Morton, B
O’Brien, T
Porter, CC
Robert, SR
Simmonds, J
Tehan, DT
Vasta, RX
Wilson, TR
Young, T

Andrews, KJ
Buchholz, S
Conaghan, PJ
Drum, DK (teller)
Falinski, JG
Flint, NJ (teller)
Gee, AR
Howard, LR
Joyce, BT
Laming, A
Ley, SP
Liu, G
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
O’Brien, LS
Pitt, KJ
Price, ML
Sharma, DN
Sukkar, MS
van Manen, AJ
Wood, JP
Zimmerman, T

NOES

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Burke, AS
Chalmers, JE
Claydon, SC
Dick, MD
Freelander, MR
Giles, AJ
Goosling, LJ
Hill, JC
Jones, SP
King, CF
Marles, RD
O’Connor, BPJ
Payne, AE
Shorten, WR
Stanley, AM (teller)
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Wilson, JH

Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Butler, TM
Clare, JD
Conroy, PM
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gorman, P
Hayes, CP
Husic, EN
Khalil, P
Leigh, AK
Mulino, D
O’Neil, CE
Ryan, JC (teller)
Smith, DPB
Templeman, SR
Watts, TG
Zappia, A

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (16:45): The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

The House divided. [16:45]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ......................49
Noes ......................38
Majority ..................11
Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER (16:45): In accordance with the resolution agreed earlier, I will now put the question on the second reading of all of the bills. The question is that these bills be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird) (16:48): The House will now consider the bills in detail. In accordance with the resolution agreed earlier, the bills will be taken as a whole. The resolution also provided that any government amendments to the bills that have been circulated be treated as if they have been moved together, any opposition amendments to the bills that may have been circulated be treated as if they have been moved together, and any amendments circulated by non-aligned members which have been circulated be treated as if they have been moved together.

Government's circulated amendments—

(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 7), omit the table item, substitute:
7. Schedule 11  The day after this Act receives the Royal Assent.
   (2) Schedule 11, item 12, page 56 (line 22), at the end of subsection 504(1), add “The increase begins on 27 April 2020.”.
   (3) Schedule 11, item 12, page 57 (line 7), after “For the”, insert “period beginning on 27 April 2020 and ending at the end of the”.
   (4) Schedule 11, item 21, page 59 (line 21), at the end of subsection 557(1), add “The increase begins on 27 April 2020.”.
   (5) Schedule 11, item 21, page 60 (line 5), after “For the”, insert “period beginning on 27 April 2020 and ending at the end of the”.
   (6) Schedule 11, item 30, page 62 (line 10), at the end of subsection 646(1), add “The increase begins on 27 April 2020.”.
   (7) Schedule 11, item 30, page 62 (line 24), after “For the”, insert “period beginning on 27 April 2020 and ending at the end of the”.
   (8) Schedule 11, item 34, page 63 (line 22), at the end of subsection 710(1), add “The increase begins on 27 April 2020.”.
   (9) Schedule 11, item 40, page 65 (lines 22 to 24), omit subitem (1).
   (10) Schedule 11, item 40, page 65 (lines 29 to 31), omit subitem (3).
   (11) Schedule 11, item 40, page 66 (lines 1 to 9), omit subitems (5) to (7).

Opposition’s circulated amendments—
(1) Schedule 13, item 1, page 76 (line 17), at the end of section 303-15, add:
   ; and (c) you satisfy that condition because of an application made by you under subregulation 6.19B(1) of the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Regulations 1994 or subregulation 4.22B(1) of the Retirement Savings Accounts Regulations 1997 before the end of the period of 6 months starting on the day Schedule 13 to the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Act 2020 commences.
   (2) Schedule 13, item 6, page 78 (after line 33), at the end of regulation 4.22B, add:
   (7) The copy of the determination given to an RSA provider must be accompanied by any information in the Regulator’s possession that the RSA provider is reasonably likely to require in order to comply with subregulation 4.20B(2) in a prompt manner.
   (3) Schedule 13, item 6, page 78 (after line 33), after regulation 4.22B, insert:
   4.22C Regulator must publish information
   The Regulator must publish, on the Regulator’s website, the following information as soon as practicable after the end of each 7 day period that begins after the commencement of this regulation:
   (a) the total number of applications made by individuals under subregulation 4.22B(1) during that period;
   (b) the total number of determinations made by the Regulator under subregulation 4.22B(3) during that period;
   (c) the total amount of benefits in RSAs covered by those determinations;
   (d) the total number of complaints received during that period by the Regulator in relation to applications or determinations made under regulation 4.22B or in relation to compliance with subregulation 4.20B(2).
   (4) Schedule 13, item 10, page 81 (after line 17), at the end of regulation 6.19B, add:
   (7) The copy of the determination given to a trustee must be accompanied by any information in the Regulator’s possession that the trustee is reasonably likely to require in order to comply with subregulation 6.17D(3) in a prompt manner.
   (5) Schedule 13, item 10, page 81 (after line 17), after regulation 6.19B, insert:
   6.19C Regulator must publish information
   The Regulator must publish, on the Regulator’s website, the following information as soon as practicable after the end of each 7 day period that begins after the commencement of this regulation:
   (a) the total number of applications made by individuals under subregulation 6.19B(1) during that period;
   (b) the total number of determinations made by the Regulator under subregulation 6.19B(3) during that period;
   (c) the total amount of benefits in regulated superannuation funds and approved deposit funds that are covered by those determinations;
   (d) the total number of complaints received during that period by the Regulator in relation to applications or determinations made under regulation 6.19B or in relation to compliance with subregulation 6.17D(3).

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (16:49): I present a supplementary explanatory memorandum to the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Whitlam) (16:49): It is the position of the Australian Labor Party that we want to provide support for households, we want to provide support for businesses, and we want to provide support for workers who are about to lose their jobs. We were told by the Treasurer in question time today that, in the coming weeks, up to one million workers are going to find themselves out of work. Labor stands ready to support the government in providing benefits to those workers.
The Leader of the Opposition has spelt out in comprehensive detail why the provisions in schedule 13 are a bad idea. They're a bad idea because the government proposes to raid the superannuation savings of workers to make up for the unwillingness it has to fund benefits adequately for workers who are about to lose their job. It is our patriotic obligation to point out a bad idea. The only thing worse than a bad idea is a bad idea that is poorly implemented. Unless Labor's amendments are accepted by the government, this proposal will be poorly implemented.

We are advised by the government that 1.6 million applicants are expected to take avail of the new provisions within this schedule. Those 1.6 million applicants will make their application to access superannuation through the myGov portal. Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, it's the very myGov portal that fell over during its first test this morning. Not only did it fall over; it was unable to cope with the overwhelming number of people who were applying to access Centrelink benefits. But the minister responsible stood in the courtyard a few moments ago and said that this was as a result of a denial-of-service attack. He then had to come into question time a few moments later and said, 'Actually, that was wrong; that was not true.' So Labor have significant concerns—and we ask the minister to respond to this: how is Labor, how is the opposition, and how, in fact, are the Australian people to have confidence that this measure is going to be properly implemented? Is it going to be a repeat of the bushfire grants all over again, where big announcements are made but they fall over in the implementation?

We are deeply concerned because of the mechanisms around which this schedule will operate. The 1.6 million applicants go to myGov, they make their applications through myGov and myGov sends it through to the regulator, who, in this instance, is the ATO—and the ATO is the assessing authority. Most people will think, 'Well, if the ATO is the approving authority, a payment can be easily issued from the ATO'—but this is not the case. The ATO sends a notice to the trustees of the member's superannuation fund, saying, 'Please pay this money into this member's bank account.' That sounds reasonable. The only problem is the superannuation accounts don't have that information. With all the goodwill in the world, the minister might wish they did and the parliament may wish they did, but the simple fact of the matter is they don't. They don't have that information.

So we have Labor's sensible amendments. If the government seriously wants to make its idea, albeit flawed, work properly, it should accept Labor's amendments. Labor's amendments—simple; perfect in their simplicity—ensure that, when the ATO contacts the superannuation fund, and says, 'This fund member is eligible to receive early relief,' the ATO must provide the superannuation fund with all the information that they have that will enable the superannuation fund to make an early release of the funds. We say to the government: accept these amendments; they will make your proposal, albeit flawed, work all the more better.

The consequence of not accepting Labor's amendments is that those applicants will go to the superannuation fund and up to 1.6 million Australians, who have been led to believe by the government that they're going to get ready release of their superannuation funds, are going to be frustrated by delay. And I'm not talking about delays of days or even weeks; it could be significant delays. If we are talking about 1.6 million Australians who are going to make an application between now and the end of June this year—and quite possibly another application a week later—it will fall over, in the same way that myGov fell over. Accept our reasonable amendments. (Time expired)

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (16:54): Our clear advice from Treasury is that this amendment is just completely unnecessary. I must say to the member that the well-established processes for releasing money from super—there are obviously existing hardship grounds, but there are a range of other cases where there have been non-concessional excess contributions and others that require releases of funds from a member's superannuation account—are done quite regularly. Of course there's going to be increased demand on the system, but what he is proposing, according to our clear advice from Treasury, makes the provisions less clear and doesn't add anything practically. In the end it will be, of course, our task to make sure that these applications are made and are delivered in an expeditious way. But what the member for Whitlam is proposing does absolutely nothing to assist that process. These are understood processes, and an important part of this entire package is that, wherever possible, we utilise existing delivery and administrative systems.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (16:55): I had a matter that I wanted to raise about the government amendments, and I don't think we concluded that issue before going on to the opposition ones. I'm just conscious of the five o'clock deadline.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird): I just indicate to the member that I haven't put the vote on the government amendments as yet.

Mr BANDT: Okay. I will raise that now, and I will be quick. I'm just wondering if the government can explain about its amendments to its bill. Do these amendments extend the coronavirus assistance that's going to be available to students on youth allowance? There are many students on youth allowance who would have been doing a couple of extra shifts to top up their youth allowance. A lot of those shifts have now been cancelled.
because they're often in the hospitality sector and sometimes in the retail sector. Those people are now going to fall behind. The government's giving some welcome assistance to youth allowance (jobseeker). That's in line with what the Greens have been calling for for some time. I'm wondering if the government can clarify this, especially given that the Prime Minister last night on television, when he was asked whether students are going to be supported, said, 'Yes, students will be supported,' but the bill seems to suggest the opposite. So can the government clarify, before the bill proceeds through here: are students receiving youth allowance going to get the extra coronavirus payment and, if not, why not, given that they may be losing significant amounts of money and may be hurting at the moment and they've still got rent and bills to pay as well?

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing) (16:57): Very briefly, the amendments moved by the government bring forward waiting period and asset test application rules. This is obviously an evolving pandemic moving very quickly, and the amendments bring forward the application of those two provisions to ensure that payments can be made more expeditiously and that the asset test doesn't apply.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the member for Melbourne seek the call?

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (16:57): Very briefly. Can the government please confirm that students on youth allowance won't be eligible for the coronavirus assistance, despite the fact the Prime Minister said on television last night they would be? Is it in fact the case that students who have lost income because they've lost their casual work will now not be eligible for the additional assistance? Can the government confirm that—yes or no? We should be able to get a clear answer about who's covered by this bill, given that we're being asked to vote on it urgently.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question before the chair is that the government amendments be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: Order! The question is that the opposition amendments be disagreed to.

The House divided, [17:03]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ..........................49
Noes ..........................38
Majority .........................11

AYES
Allen, K
Andrews, KJ
Andrews, KL
Buchholz, S
Chester, D
Conaghan, PJ
Connelly, V
Drum, DK (teller)
Evans, TM
Falinski, JG
Fletcher, PW
Flint, NJ (teller)
Frydenberg, JA
Gee, AR
Haines, H
Hogan, KJ
Howarth, LR
Hunt, GA
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Laming, A
Leeser, J
Ley, SP
Littleproud, D
Liu, G
Martin, FB
McCormack, MF
McIntosh, MI
Morrison, SJ
Morton, B
O'Brien, LS
O'Brien, T
Pitt, KJ
Porter, CC
Price, ML
Robert, SR
Sharkie, RCC
Sharma, DN
Simmonds, J
Steggall, Z
Sukkar, MS
Tchantchou, DT
van Manen, AJ
Vasta, RX
Wallace, AB
Wilson, TR
Wood, JP
Young, T
Zimmerman, T

NOES
Albanese, AN
Bandt, AP
Bird, SL
Bowen, CE
Burke, AS
Butler, MC
Chalmers, JE
Clare, JD
Question agreed to.

Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020, as amended, and related bills agreed to.


Third Reading

The SPEAKER (17:07): In accordance with the resolution agreed earlier, I now put the question that these bills be read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a third time.

Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021

Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021

Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021

First Reading

Messages from the Governor-General recommending appropriation for the bills announced.

Bills and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Sukkar

Bills read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (17:11): I move:

That these bills be now read a second time.

Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021

Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021 and Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021, together with Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021 and Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021, seeks appropriations to facilitate the continuation of normal government business.

These bills are necessary to ensure the proper functioning of government services and the continuation of vital programs in an environment of global economic uncertainty resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

This economic uncertainty impacts the forecasts on which the federal budget depends. Consequently, the government has decided to reschedule this year's federal budget to 6 October 2020. This will also ensure that the 2020-21 budget can set out the path to economic recovery.

This delay of the budget does not, however, stand in the way of timely and comprehensive responses to the present health and economic challenges. This week the government has brought forward a wide-reaching package of legislation, including expenditure, tax-relief and streamlined regulatory measures, to support its coronavirus economic response. Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021 provides for appropriations for proposed expenditure on the ordinary annual services of the government for the first seven months of 2021.
This is slightly longer than the customary five-month contingency that has been provided in some recent supply bills. In the present uncertain circumstances, it is important that supply arrangements include enough contingency and ensure adequate time for parliamentary scrutiny of appropriation bills.

The bill seeks approval for appropriations from the consolidated revenue fund of just over $76.3 billion. The appropriations proposed in this bill are broadly based on seven-twelfths of the estimated 2020-21 annual appropriations. The 2020-21 estimates are largely the 2019-20 base, adjusted for economic and program-specific parameters, and the effect of decisions announced as part of MYEFO or included in the 2019-20 additional estimates appropriations bills, plus, of course, the COVID-19 related measures.

The bill must be passed in this session to ensure funding is available to all entities from 1 July 2020, thereby ensuring the continuity of program and service delivery. The seven-twelfths allocations are adjusted where necessary for programs or agencies that are expected to face additional pressures in the first seven months of the financial year.

I want to emphasise that this bill seeks provision only to fund government expenditure on an interim basis until the 2020-21 budget appropriation bills have passed; therefore, no new measures for the 2020-21 budget are included in this bill. The bill also provides an advance to the finance minister (AFM) provision of $16 billion, to provide the government with the capacity to allocate additional appropriations for urgent and unforeseen expenditure. This ensures that sufficient appropriations are available to meet unforeseen costs, which may include responding to the need for increased medical services and the need to provide capacity for further economic stimulus, should this be required, and supporting the ongoing business of government. In light of the size of this advance to the finance minister, it is proposed to institute additional transparency measures on its use. This will include a regular media release which reports and reconciles the use of the AFM provision. Details of the proposed expenditure are set out in the schedule to the bill, the EM and the various portfolio statements.

Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021

Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021, along with Supply Bill (No. 1) and the Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1), again, seeks appropriations to facilitate the continuation of normal government business. Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021 provides for appropriations that are not for the ordinary annual services of governments, such as for capital works and services, and for payments to states, territories and local governments, for the first seven months of 2020-21. The bill seeks approval for appropriations from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of just under $6.7 billion. The appropriations proposed in this bill are broadly based on seven-twelfths of the estimated 2020-21 annual appropriations. The 2020-21 estimates are largely on the 2019-20 base, adjusted for economic and program-specific parameters and the effect of decisions in MYEFO or included in the additional estimates appropriation bills, plus the COVID-19 related measures. The seven-twelfths allocations are adjusted where necessary, where organisations are expected to face additional pressures in the first seven months of the year—for example, further capital funding for the National Medical Stockpile. The supply bills also take into account terminating programs.

The bill also establishes the debt limits for 2020-21 for general-purpose financial assistance payments and national partnership payments. The debit limits in the bill reflect a full year of the estimated 2020-21 limits, so that agreements with other governments can be established with certainty for the full year. The bill must be passed in this session to ensure funding is available to all entities from 1 July 2020, ensuring the continuity of program and service delivery.

As with Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021, this bill seeks provision only to fund government expenditure on an interim basis until budget appropriation bills have been passed, and, therefore, no new measures, I emphasise, for the 2020-21 budget are included in this bill either. The bill also provides an advance to the finance minister (AFM), a provision of $24 billion, to provide the government with the capacity to allocate additional appropriations for urgent and unforeseen expenditure. This ensures sufficient appropriations are available to meet unforeseen costs, which may include responding to the need for additional and more costly medical equipment driven by international competition and the need to provide capacity for further economic stimulus, should that be required, and supporting the ongoing business of government. In light of the size of the AFM, it’s proposed to institute additional transparency measures on its use. This, again, will include a regular media release which reports and reconciles the use of the provision. Again, details of the proposed expenditure are set out in the schedule to the bill, the EM and the various portfolio statements.

Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021

Finally, the Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021 provides appropriations for the first seven months of 2020-21 for the operations of:

- the Department of the Senate;
Monday, 23 March 2020

the Department of the House of Representatives;

the Department of Parliamentary Services; and

the Parliamentary Budget Office.

This bill seeks approval for appropriations from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of just over $150 million. The appropriations proposed in this bill are broadly based on seven-twelfths of the estimated 2020-21 annual appropriations, which are, largely, the 2019-20 base adjusted for economic and program-specific parameters. The bill must be passed in this session to ensure that funding for these vital agencies is available to these departments from 1 July 2020, thereby ensuring the continuity of our parliament's operations.

As with the other supply bills, I want to emphasise that this bill seeks provision only to appropriate money to fund government expenditure on an interim basis until budget appropriations bills have been passed. Again, no measures for the 2020-21 budget are included in this bill. This arrangement, importantly, allows for Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill No. 1 2020-21, or a similar bill, to be passed when parliament resumes sitting, if necessary. Again, details of the proposed expenditure are set out in the schedule to the bill, the EM and the various 2019-20 portfolio statements. I therefore commend the bills to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird): In accordance with the resolution agreed to earlier, the question is that these bills be now read a second time. I give the call to the shadow Treasurer.

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (17:20): Thanks very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak on and support these supply bills—Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021, Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021 and Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021. We support them for the usual reasons but also because in this case, considering some of the extraordinary measures in them, they are a sensible contingency for the next seven months to make sure that the usual operations of government can continue and so that we can update the advance to the finance minister provisions to allow for what are extremely uncertain times when it comes to the provision of public funds over the next little while.

As the assistant minister said a moment ago, they provide seven months of funding for the year, with a couple of exceptions around the National Disability Insurance Agency, and full-year funding for Services Australia, the tax office and the health department, which are crucial right now, and also for the measures specifically associated with the coronavirus response. They appropriate some large sums. That is a sensible contingency given the position that we find ourselves in.

I want to speak in a little more detail about the advance to the finance minister provisions. These have existed for some time but have now been updated in the usual way in the bills that are before us. The advance allows the finance minister to appropriate money in unforeseen circumstances, when there's otherwise been an error or when there's funding which is supported but has not yet been appropriated in the other ways. The provisions are usually for a reasonable, modest amount. For example, there was a $295 million advance and a $300 million advance in recent times. These supply bills are proposing an unprecedented advance to the finance minister. We have supported that on this side of the House, consistent with what we've been saying all day about the other bills, which I was able to talk about at length this morning. We are being as responsible, constructive and supportive as we can be. We recognise that this is not business as usual in the economy, so it shouldn't be business as usual in politics either. We have engaged with the government on aspects of these supply bills. I wanted to recognise the work of the shadow finance minister, Katy Gallagher in the other place, working with her counterpart, Mathias Cormann, the finance minister. They have had their heads together for some time on these matters and have been able to negotiate quite effectively. Senator Gallagher, who is a far better shadow finance minister than her predecessor ever was, has done a great job in securing some commitments from the government. They've been mentioned by the minister opposite in his contribution a moment ago.

For example, when the government use the advance provisions, they now need to issue a press release so that there is some transparency, after every single use of the advance. Secondly, if there's an advance greater than $1 billion, it requires approval from the opposition, via Senator Gallagher in the other place, with an exchange of letters. You can imagine lots of circumstances in the current climate where there might be a need for big health expenditure. If it is more than $1 billion, Senator Cormann would write to Senator Gallagher. They would exchange letters quickly, and the advance could take place. We think an extra layer of agreement and consultation between the government and the opposition is an important step, given the magnitude of the money involved here. These measures will enhance transparency and scrutiny and will improve the process of relying on that advance, particularly now when there is so much focus on what else we might need to do, whether it be in health spending or other types of spending, to help Australians get through a very difficult period.

I will touch on one other issue. I had an opportunity earlier today to talk about the broader economic stimulus measures. I will add one more point. In addition to the agreement that's been struck between the government and
the opposition on the additional transparency for this advance mechanism, we do think it important that the government consider, more than they have to this point, releasing some kind of updated economic forecast and budget forecasts. We understand, and we said so publicly on the day that the government announced that they wanted to push the budget back, that there are severe workforce issues in the Commonwealth Treasury and the Department of Finance. We are cognisant of those. When the government pushed back the budget to October we said that we recognise that there are issues there and that it would be difficult to do a full, comprehensive budget on the original time frame. At the same time, we do think it would be very important to not keep the Australian people in the dark for the 10 months between the mid-year update last December and the budget in this coming October.

We need Australian businesses and the broader Australian community to know what the Commonwealth Treasury thinks is going to happen in the economy and in the budget. This is crucial. We can't have people in the dark for such a long period about what the Treasury thinks. It's really important that the vacuum is not filled in the absence of credible Treasury forecasts by all kinds of other guesstimates that we have to rely on. It's not a partisan point or a heavily political argument that we're having. I've engaged on it with the Treasurer and with the Treasury secretary, and we had the opportunity to engage with the Prime Minister on it in the cabinet room yesterday. We want the professionalism of the Commonwealth Treasury applied to giving the Australian people, Australian businesses and decision-makers of all kinds in the economy the capacity to know what the Treasury thinks is happening. The regular monthly updates in the budget are not enough. They're backward looking. We need a forward-looking sense of what's happening in the budget and what's happening in the economy. So as part of the constructive process that has happened here to agree to these supply bills and the advance to the finance minister provisions, ideally, the government would also reconsider their position on providing other kinds of forecasts so that people can have a sense of what the Treasury thinks about the state of the economy and the state of the budget.

That doesn't prevent us from supporting these supply bills for all the usual reasons but also the additional reasons of urgency and uncertainty right now. We are pleased to do so. We thank Senator Cormann and Senator Gallagher for their negotiation that led to this outcome. Other colleagues no doubt will avail themselves of the opportunity to speak about the supply bills and also about the coronavirus measures more broadly.

Debate interrupted.

**Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird) (17:28): The Speaker has received a message from His Excellency the Governor-General recommending in accordance with section 56 of the Constitution an appropriation for the purposes of amendments moved by a minister to the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020.

**Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021**
**Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021**
**Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021**

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That these bills be now read a second time.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (17:28): I'm pleased to rise today to avail myself of an opportunity to speak on the supply bills but, as the member for Rankin has just outlined, to take that opportunity to make some points around the COVID-19 bills that preceded it in the chamber today. As we have heard many times today, the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer have said the opposition will continue to work constructively with the government to ensure passage of this legislation and other bills to keep Australians in work. Labor's priority is to protect lives and jobs, to help Australian workers, businesses, families and communities through this difficult time and to ensure vulnerable Australians are supported and their health is protected. We understand that people are anxious at the moment, which is why Labor will continue to be supportive, responsible and constructive—and that means injecting a sense of urgency where we see it lacking or absent. In my contribution today, I want to take some time out to speak specifically about the aged-care sector and some of the government's initiatives in the aged-care sector. I want to put on the record our thanks and our concerns for actions taken and actions that we see need to be taken.

I'll begin by putting on the record our thanks and gratitude to many of our aged-care workforce. This period of time has been tough and will continue to be so, but the work you're doing to help those with this virus poses the biggest risk and is remarkable and invaluable. We also know that the work you're doing is demanding and
challenging. Be assured we are thinking of you all at this time and Labor will continue to support aged-care workers through these challenging times. We welcome the government's announcement regarding COVID-19 support for aged care and older Australians. We appreciate that the government has taken up some of Labor's proposals to support the aged-care industry and to assist and protect older Australians. It is vitally important that aged-care workers are supported at this time. They are on the front line of our nation's efforts to flatten the curve and to save lives.

In saying this, we still have a number of concerns. I spoke last night to the member for Newcastle, who had spoken to aged-care facilities in her electorate; I spoke today to the member for Franklin, the shadow minister, who had similarly phoned residential aged care in her electorate; and my office this morning spoke to one of our local residential aged-care providers. The news from them was not fabulous, particularly around the stimulus package. This particular local provider made the decision to go into total lockdown last night. Whilst they've been diligent, they feel that they are unable to control people who visit who may have had contact with the virus, and so they have taken that action. They have had some people tested during this process because people had shown symptoms, and they'd had a visitor whose partner was isolating. They've set up FaceTime and Skype for residents to maintain contact with loved ones. I would urge the government, at this point in time, to do more to support other aged-care providers to ensure that they can similarly keep family members in contact with aged-care residents while they're in isolation. They've also set up one room, accessible without entering any other room in the facility, for end-of-life situations.

They are experiencing big problems with supplies. Prices have soared, they're saying, on everything, and deliveries have gone from 24 hours to 48 hours to two weeks. They have no face masks at all. They've contacted the government medical supply and got an email back saying that they've been inundated with orders—and there's nothing since. Their food portions have had to be reduced due to the delivery situation, and they've had to change to a basic menu as many items are not available. They order through a wholesaler. Stocks of required items such as incontinence pads, toilet paper and bath sheets are extremely low, so they have had to change their practices around that.

As far as the stimulus is concerned, they think they might be eligible but they have no idea how much they would get, because they'd have to wait until their next BAS to get any real indication. I would urge the government to show much more urgency in this space. As comforting as it is for the families of these residents in this particular facility, other family members need to know that they're going to be able to Skype to talk to residents in aged care. We urge the government to do more to assist in that area. Having looked at the package of support for aged-care workers, we urge you to do more to give reassurance that all aged-care workers will have the protective personal equipment that they need and, if they get sick, they will be paid. These are the assurances that we need to see from government immediately. We welcome other measures that the government has taken, one of which is the expansion of Meals on Wheels. We welcome this inclusion. We've always acknowledged the important work they do, and we welcome what the government's doing in that space.

However, we heard in Senate question time today from aged-care minister Richard Colbeck that 10 aged-care residents and seven workers have tested positive for COVID-19. This is the news I have been dreading since this emergency began because it signals what we all know, and that is that the spread of COVID-19 will be very difficult to slow once it reaches aged-care residents. It is incredibly sad that that milestone has occurred today, but it adds to the urgency the government needs to take. Aged-care residences like my local one have only had negative test results. They know they're safe now. They need to know they can continue to be safe, and they need government support to ensure that.

I'd like to make a few comments about what's going on in my electorate and about the government's general stimulus response and the plans. I want to put on the record that I have concerns that the coronavirus supplement may not be available for some Australian families struggling to put food on the table, particularly given there's been no change to the income test. That is of critical concern. I've said from the outset that this health crisis and necessary government action to limit its spread will mean an economic downturn which will shed a light on the fundamental changes that have occurred across our society in work—the insecure nature and the casualisation. My electorate is ground zero for those changes that have occurred across the last decade of our industrial relations environment, and the Centrelink queues today are part of that realisation. I know that Australians will be shocked tonight when they sit down to watch the news and see those Centrelink queues around the country. This is another part we have all been dreading but knew was coming.

I'm grateful that the government has put some things in place, but I want to highlight a few of the things I'd like to see more action taken on. One of those in an electorate like mine is around New Zealand citizens who've been paying taxes in this country for many years but who, at the moment, don't have access to Centrelink the way Australian citizens do if and when they lose their jobs when things slow down, they have no shifts and workplaces
close. I also want to highlight that I have 50 asylum seekers in my electorate who are currently not eligible for any benefits because they haven't managed to get onto the safe haven visa. These 50 individuals will need support. I'd also like to highlight the number of international students I have in my electorate and the fact that they will find work much more difficult to get as they go online for their studies. I'd like to highlight that for the government to consider. I would also highlight, of course, the number of sole traders I have in my electorate. They are feeling abandoned. They want me to say so in this place, so I take the opportunity to do so today. Many have said they don't want to access their superannuation. They want real government support so that, at the end of this bridge that the government is talking about, their business can be re-ignited.

I want to talk to the young people in my electorate and electorates across the country. One of the things that schools spend countless hours on is the things that are never tested. Schools teach socialisation well beyond the preparatory years. We work with young people helping them develop impulse control, we work with them developing pro-social behaviours, we work with them on their creativity and we work with them on their mental health. I want to send a message to the young people who will be finishing school in Victoria and going on holidays tomorrow. Remember to self-monitor your impulse control and your mental wellbeing. Continue to talk to your friends and to trusted adults. You need to think carefully and clearly about those you love and help us minimise the spread of this virus. Think about your grandparents, think about the vulnerable people who live near you or attend school with you, think about the people who are already in hospital needing support, and stay home. When you want to go out, remember them and instead Skype a friend or organise an online group chat. You are incredibly creative individuals. Find ways to connect. You are the most tech-savy generation we have seen. We know you can do this. Please reach out to one another, look after one another's mental health and continue to find ways to connect.

I want to thank all of the teachers in my local community, who've been working so tirelessly to support our students. Particularly in Victoria, I know how hard they've been working to get the online environment ready for students beyond this school holiday break so that their students' learning can continue. I want to thank them for the time they've spent.

I want to stress to the government that the banks and the mortgage suspension of payments is very, very welcome but, please, banks, don't create caveats that lock out the vulnerable. I'd ask the government to look at people in communities like mine that might be with the smaller credit unions and therefore won't have access to the big four banks and their notions of mortgage suspension. I suppose what I'm asking for is: look at the margins, to the people who are living in those margins, many of whom live in electorates like mine.

When I tell stories of our electorate, I often reference the important roles schools, sporting teams, clubs and associations and community organisations have in building community, of them being the glue that binds us. Without these, over the next few weeks and months, being in our daily lives, things will be difficult. I encourage all to find ways, like I did with the young people, to stay connected to your sporting teams, your concert band, your schoolteachers—the things that bind us together.

I want to alert my community to the great work being done by Wyndham City Council in preparation. They are leading in Victoria in some of the things they are putting in place. If you don't already, 'like' the Wyndham City Council Facebook page so you know what's going on in our local community. 'Like' my social pages and my Facebook page so you can keep up. 'Like' our state members' Facebook pages so that you can keep up. We promise that we will continue to put out information that we hope will be helpful.

Finally, I want to say: we're encouraging everybody to be online, kids included—I am actively doing that—but, please, don't share things that are not real. We've seen in the last 48 hours a terrible story being shared that the Victoria Police have said is absolutely not true. We need to look after one another at this time. We need to reach out to one another—without touching of course. We need to reach out virtually to one another to ensure that what binds us together keeps us together through this. The queues at Centrelink need to be calm. People can use myGov. We'll get through these processes, I'm sure. If you haven't already registered for myGov, then across the next 48 hours, please do. Even if you don't think you need it yet, you may need it in the coming weeks. Being able to do it online and not lining up at Centrelink will certainly be easier.

My office is there to help the people in our community. As we push through, particularly around Centrelink issues, we'll be there to assist. Please don't hesitate to ring the office. We are still answering the phone and we will continue to do so. I think that's it, other than to suggest to this government: we have a pattern of making announcements but the implementation is what matters. Please, don't make announcements that confuse, that promise but won't deliver in a timely way. Resource your commitments. Back up the announcements with action. Don't suggest one thing without guaranteeing it, like the business support that is based on staff but gives no guarantees it will be spent on staff. Please don't create that division between worker and employer. Don't create a scenario where a worker will blame their employer if they don't manage to get that money to them. The
government needs to think seriously. Please: the last thing we need from this government is a sense that we are pitching one Australian against another. It is not what we need; we need exactly the opposite. I hope today we've demonstrated our ability to do that in this place and that's transferred to my community and communicated to communities across the country. Thank you.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (17:43): Australia, along with the rest of the world, is facing a global health crisis. It's a deadly pandemic that has already taken several thousand lives. Our first priority of course should be, and must be, to save lives. There will be an economic fallout, because of it. This package that's been brought to the parliament attempts to deal with that. The most effective economic action we can take is to control and eliminate COVID-19.

If Australia ever needed leadership, it is now. Across the world and here in Australia, people are facing uncertainty, turmoil and life-threatening risks which create fear and panic—and we have seen that and spoken about it in debates today. Most people have never experienced anything like this or close to it in their lifetime. Without warning, normality as we have come to know it—simple things we took for granted—has abruptly come to an end at least for now, and in some cases possibly forever.

COVID-19 will change how we live and how we think into the future. Very few, if any, parts of society will not be affected in one way or another. In some cases it will be drastically affected. Some sectors will fare better than others. However, in a globalised world, the fallout will indeed be far and wide. People are therefore looking to governments for leadership. This should be a time when political differences are set aside and we work for the betterment of the people that we all represent. This should be a time when opinions, regardless of where they come from, are respectfully debated and new ideas are candidly and openly considered; when, for example, work and study for home may become a way of life for people into the future; when Australia's reliance on overseas countries for basic needs is no longer acceptable and greater effort is made to rebuild our manufacturing sector; and when identified gaps in our health system are rectified.

This should also be a time that as a nation we reassess our strengths, our vulnerabilities and our place in a global future. The stimulus package before us and other government COVID-19 response measures should not solely be measures to minimise the damage, care for the immediate needs and restore normality. The package should simultaneously better prepare Australia for a more secure future. While for years the spotlight and the public debate has been on climate change, the rising influence of China or perhaps another global financial recession, the world ignored the obvious and profound global risks of a world overly connected and overly interdependent. COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of globalisation and open borders that the global free market advocates and power hungry transnationals have relentlessly pursued for decades.

COVID-19 has made a difference to the thinking of people right around the world. I note that, in the midst of COVID-19, many of the big corporates are now showing compassion and social responsibility that was previously unseen. I welcome that. However, the rich and powerful also know that their own survival depends on the survival of the masses from whom their wealth is generated. Self-interest is a powerful force.

COVID-19 brings home many realities, now acknowledged in the stimulus package and other government response measures. It's also an opportunity to rethink longstanding societal norms and open doorways to innovation. The financial stimulus measures acknowledge that economies are indeed much stronger when poorer or low-income people have more to spend; that governments and, in Australia's case, the Reserve Bank, should rightfully be in the banking business; and that Newstart is and has been inadequate and it makes economic sense to increase it. The kinds of measures that the government has brought forward in all of its packages are measures that some of us in this place have been calling for for a long time because it's in the national interest to do so. It's good and heartening to see that the government has embraced those ideas for the very same reason that it now understands that it is good and it is in the national interest and it is in the economic interest of the nation to do all those things. It always has been, but, for reasons I could never fathom, the government chose to do differently.

This issue also exposes that we, as a nation, need to stop continuing to be reliant on overseas countries for basic, everyday needs. The loss of manufacturing in this country is a great example, where, here and now, we have short supplies of many things that are essential to our needs but which we have to rely on overseas countries for and which should otherwise have been produced here in Australia. We need to get back to being a country that makes things so that at times like this we can indeed do that, just as we did in the World War II years with our manufacturing sector. It applies right across the board, to everything we need. It doesn't make sense to leave yourself vulnerable to other countries when, for one reason or another, you can't get those products immediately you need them.

This is the time when, had we the capacity, we might have been able to innovate. In respect of that, I certainly commend the health researchers we have in this country. They have always shown leadership and continue to do so with respect to the work that is going on to look for some solutions and perhaps some medicines that will assist
with the COVID-19 problem, not just here but across the world. But, again, that's the kind of thing that every country should be getting prepared to do.

In the course of the last few weeks, my office has been contacted by many, many people with all kinds of suggestions and, in some cases, problems. I want to touch briefly on some of those issues, because they haven't all been addressed within this package. The first relates to one of the ironies of this package—that is, the very businesses and enterprises we are trying to assist by way of a stimulus package will not be assisted because, on the other hand, we have set in place regulations which close them down. The very small businesses that would otherwise have looked forward to a stimulus package—and that were very much supported by the stimulus package of the Rudd-Gillard years—will not be able to benefit from it because they are no longer able to trade, because of the restrictions, across the country, of people's movements. That happens to be something that concerns me. I would have thought one of the things we're trying to do is keep those businesses afloat, yet at the same time we're telling them they have to close down. It's for good reason, I understand that, but they will miss out on the benefits of the stimulus package. Amongst them are sole traders and many small and family business operators, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors. We've seen, through the announcement last night, that many of them will have to close their doors. Many of those small business operators will be hit extremely hard. And, as I say, whilst they might be able to access other government support—and I'm not sure just who will be and who won't be, because there are obviously qualifications with respect to that—the fact is the stimulus won't help them, because their doors are shut.

Along with that, I've also had representation made to me by several people with respect to heartless landlords who will not show any compassion at a time when they should and who continue to charge full rental rates. The reality is it's in their own long-term interest to show a little bit of goodwill at this time and perhaps lower their rental charges. I urge landlords across Australia who haven't—and I know that many have, and I commend them for doing so—to rethink their position and assist their tenants by doing so.

I've been contacted by several people, who are either overseas or have family members overseas, who are trying desperately to get back home. Those people are stuck in countries where the borders, even within those countries, particularly some of the South American countries, have been closed, and they cannot get out. I urge the government to do what it can to assist them and facilitate their return to Australia. I'm sure that if they were family members of any one of us in this parliament we would want to see them brought home as quickly as possible. I realise it's a big task. I realise that at any one time there are hundreds of thousands of people overseas. But, for those who are caught in a country where they can't get out and who have asked for consular and government assistance, I urge the government to do whatever it can.

Along with that, one of the issues that truly concerns me—and I know it concerns everyone else in this place—is the panic buying that we have seen. Whilst it's unnecessary, the reality is that fear causes people to do it. When people walk into grocery stores and see the shelves empty, if they can buy something they think they will need the following week and the week after then of course they will do so. The problem, however, is that people who are not panic buying, who need essential goods and items, then go into the grocery stores. I had one case where, on four different occasions, a person went into all the stores in his locality and wasn't able to buy essential supplies for his household. I am talking about an elderly couple. So my request to the government is to look at what other measures it can bring in to try to ensure that panic buying is controlled. It will be in everyone's interest if we are able to do that.

In respect of the issues that could be looked at even further, my view is that local governments across the country could do a little more as well. Local government is one level of government that has a very secure income stream. At times like this, when they can borrow at very low interest rates, local governments should be doing that and bringing forward their capital works to keep people employed. With the interest rates at which they can borrow, it makes sense for them to do works that they know have to be done down the track at any event, even if it means they have to borrow the money. If they're borrowing at literally no interest, there's no reason they shouldn't be doing it, and I urge local governments to do so. I also urge local governments to consider how they might provide rate relief to some of the businesses that are going to find things difficult in the weeks and months ahead.

Lastly, I too want to thank the many people out there who over the last few weeks have worked tirelessly to assist the community to get through this. I'm referring to the health workers, wherever they might be; the pharmacists, who I know have been put under incredible pressure to provide assistance; the retail grocery workers, who in some cases are dealing every day with unhappy customers and the like but are doing their best to provide services; the aged-care workers, who others have spoken about; and of course the teachers, who have been working through this in a way that perhaps others haven't. Sometimes, it seems to me, we take teachers for granted. We treat them as nothing more than babysitters or child minders, when the truth is that they are educators. Their first and foremost responsibility is to be educators. They have been working, in many cases, with
uncertainty hanging over their head but also in conditions in which others might have said, 'I don't want to work in those conditions.'

Labor have made it clear: we will support this package. Regardless of any criticisms I and others have made about its shortfalls and regardless of whether we could do more, the fact is that we need to provide support as soon as possible, and we will be supporting these measures.

Mr GORMAN (Perth) (17:58): Like all Australians right now, I feel scared and anxious about what's happening in our country. It's okay to feel scared. I'm not afraid to say I'm worried about my community of Perth, including my family, my friends and my neighbours, and what the world will look like for my son and thousands of local kids once this is all over. But it's how we act on those feelings that matters most. We should act out of hope that we can get through this, not fear, which drives selfishness and meaningless panic. You don't need to be a vaccine scientist to know that you can turn fear, very effectively, into purpose and compassion. Australians are reminded afresh that we are citizens of the world and we are all in this together.

At the very heart of my electorate of Perth stands block C of Royal Perth Hospital, built in response to the Spanish flu. Today, Royal Perth Hospital is the heart of the testing for WA's response to the coronavirus. I want to say thank you to every health worker, from the catering staff, who work in the basement of that beast of a hospital, to the cleaners, who keep it clean and healthy, to every medical professional.

I also want to thank everyone for turning up to work to support their fellow Australians: community and personal service workers, some 7,996 in the Perth electorate; retail and sales staff, some 6,096 in the Perth electorate; and health workers, 3,183 in the Perth electorate. At the last census there were 3,147 hospitality workers, and I know that today there are not that many hospitality workers. It is a very tough day for those who work in some of those industries.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of the WA Premier, Mark McGowan, and the Deputy Premier, Roger Cook, and commend them for opening new coronavirus clinics in Armadale, Rockingham, Joondalup and Midland this week. They have been clear and compassionate in their communication and they have put the interests of Western Australians and, therefore, the interests of all Australians first. I am proud to be a Western Australian voice in this parliament, but I acknowledge that there are fewer Western Australian voices in this parliament this week because of the limitations that we have had to go through. I thank the whips and I thank everyone who has made arrangements so that we can have some voices, but this is not a parliament of all voices as it normally is.

Yesterday, before flying to Canberra, I got coffee from Miller and Baker, one of hundreds of great cafes in Perth. They only opened their business in December. I said to the owners that we would be passing some legislation to help their cash flow. Without missing a beat, they responded, 'What about our casual staff?' That sort of compassion is what we need from every employer in the country right now. Today, businesses across my electorate and across every electorate in the country are closing. For me, it is the Court Hotel, Picabar, the Inglewood Hotel and our local, the Rosemount, to name a few. But, unlike Blockbuster Video, they are not closed forever; they will reopen. But for these businesses and their staff these are going to be the longest months of their life.

Just a month ago, Perth was buzzing with the fringe festival. I am now being flooded by emails from people who are asking, 'What's next?', and even saying, 'I've lost my job but what can I do to help?' This is the most uncertain of times for so many people. I want particularly to mention those in the creative and performing arts. I got an email from Paul in Mt Lawley, who works in the arts industry. He said he has been watching very closely, and the I Lost My Gig counter is now noting some $280 million of lost work—that is, 255,000 gig event cancellations and counting.

These are incredibly tough times but we need everyone in this parliament to do their job and to do it well. In that spirit, every Australian needs the Prime Minister to do well now. I want him and his team to be incredibly successful in battling this virus. Peoples' lives do rest on them making the right decision day after day after day. If we think about the lessons of our recent history of the global financial crisis, this parliament saw too much immature behaviour from too many members too often, and some of that carried on for too long, in my view. The government should reflect on the fortune they have to have someone like Anthony Albanese, the Leader of the Opposition, as the opposition leader at a time like this. He is a decent person and a true parliamentarian, someone who was Leader of the House during that global financial crisis and who has shown today that Labor and he have learnt those lessons. He is someone who knows that our work ultimately in this place is in the service of all Australians.

A friend said to me this morning—I will steal his quote and half-reference it—'We don't have a cure for this virus but we do have the medicine of kindness, compassion and hope.' I think that is a really smart way of
summing up what we can and what we can't do right now. We have kindness and, in that spirit, I'd like to thank some of those who teach kindness at the earliest years, the early-childhood educators, who in their work just as hard and are in just as difficult a position as our teachers and teachers' assistants. We have compassion. We know that racism will never be a sustainable economic strategy. We have hope, because so many people in this place and, indeed, Australians, all 25 million of them, have at some time in their lives overcome great personal crisis and come out stronger the other side.

We are experiencing, as many have said, a health and an economic crisis. Sadly, natural disasters will not take a break while we battle the coronavirus. We have heard briefings that domestic violence will get worse, as will homelessness. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it is pretty hard to self-isolate if you're homeless. I note that the Premier of New South Wales has today coordinated with an international hotels group to provide homes for some 300 people in Sydney. I think that was a very smart move and something that we should look at here in Australia. We think that there is a need for people who cannot apply the social distancing and isolation that is required to contain this virus. My fear is that over time, over this year, we have a risk that this health and economic crisis becomes a democratic and international security crisis. We must maintain our belief in democracy. We must continue to practise democracy. If for just one day Australia sends a message to our neighbours across the world that democracy is optional, we will encourage a security crisis.

We've also seen warnings on cybersecurity with these rapidly changing work arrangements. These are serious warnings too. We need to keep our international institutions talking. It was the G20 that helped us through the global financial crisis. We now need the World Health Organization to be more successful than it has ever been in its history. When we return to a normal sitting schedule, I hope that some of the constructive tone of today remains. The members of this parliament must also come with a comprehensive plan for the recovery phase. We are going to be given a bit of time to think about that with some of our other duties being lightened. So it's important that we actually have that comprehensive plan in place on how we rebuild—to have thriving small businesses and return to a world full of joy, performing arts and culture, with a normal education system. We will have no excuse. The hard thinking and long-term planning must be done now. That involves new ideas, new ways of thinking and new ways of working together. We should do it, because that's the only way that we can rebuild a fairer and stronger community than the one we had before this horrible virus.

Ms TEMPLEMAN (Macquarie) (18:06): I rise to speak on Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021 and related bills and to address the challenging times that we now face. There is no better indication of the desperation that people are feeling in my electorate than the queues that have formed outside Centrelink offices today and the emails and messages that I'm getting from people who need financial support now. It is our job here in this place—in fact it's our obligation—to pass legislation that provides the necessary supports so that people's immediate financial needs are met, so that they can focus on what really matters right now, which is protecting themselves and their families from the health risk that this virus presents.

Coronavirus is first and foremost a health risk, so let's make sure that people are not forced to choose between their health and their finances. We need to do this swiftly. We will continue to ask the government to consider the extra steps that we recommend to protect people's financial situations as we go through these very challenging months ahead. For my community it comes on top of bushfires. We were barely able to start the recovery before this double financial whammy happened. Our economy was sluggish before the fires, shattered by the fires, and now it's even tougher for businesses to withstand the current situation. The $10,000 bushfire grants that we fought for are proving useful for many businesses, but there are others still waiting to see if they're eligible. I'd encourage all businesses in the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury who were affected by fires and smoke to investigate that grant.

So to the new measures that have been passed. We welcome the significant increase in jobseeker allowance through the $550-a-fortnight coronavirus supplement, the waiving of the assets test and waiving of waiting times. But 27 April is too far away. The queues and crashing of the myGov website show just how great the need is right now. The second one-off $750 payment to many social security, veteran and other income support recipients, including pensioners, is also welcome but it is being paid in July. That is too far away. The further reduction of the deeming rates to 0.25 per cent at the lower rate and 2.25 as the upper rate is also welcome, but I'm not sure why it has to wait until May.

It's concerning that there are no changes to the jobseeker payment income test. I've been answering many questions about this this afternoon. It means that singles with an income above $542 a week and couples with an income above $993.50 per week will not be eligible for any payments, even if a member of that couple has lost their job, lost their business or had hours substantially reduced. In two-income families, when one person loses their job, they are going to be at risk of missing out because the threshold is low. While I welcome the fact that it's been extended to people who've been stood down on no pay, to contractors and to sole traders, the failure to
change that requirement is going to mean many people miss out on support, as will students and disability pension holders.

For sole traders, who make up a huge number of businesses in my electorate, there are enormous uncertainties. Not only do they need to replace the income that they generate for themselves through their business but they may have to keep paying rent and keep their premises ready to reopen when that is eventually allowed. Businesses who are franchised wonder if they can get relief from those payments. What access will these organisations have to loans? Will they qualify for any extra payments? So for sole traders this is still a time of great uncertainty, and there is definitely more that can be done to support them.

The arts sector—the musicians, the actors, the set designers, the directors, the roadies, the dancers, the singers, the painters, the sculptors and the filmmakers—have had the rug pulled from under them. Their existence was already precarious. Now their income is non-existent. This industry needs something extra to give these amazing people some hope that their sector will be viable when this whole thing is over, that theatres will reopen and that venues will function again.

Travel agents—the ones who've been frantically fielding calls from their customers to ask questions, to cancel bookings, to seek help in getting back to Australia and to deal with the disappointment of people not getting all their money back, and the agents who are watching commissions that were in the door go out the door—need more help. Hotel operators, operators of all the organisations now closed—the gyms, the bars and the nightclubs—and the massage therapists and hairdressers who have already, after assessing the risks, stopped their work all need more.

I think what's really frustrating is that, based on the announcements on Friday, a lot of businesses, like the Archibald Hotel in Kurrajong Heights, went to enormous lengths to quickly meet those requirements and educate customers, only to be told yesterday, two days later, that a large part of their business actually had to close. Small businesses who were doing the right thing are now looking at a very different future. They're adapting fast to takeaway and deliveries, suggesting that EFTPOS fees be dropped so people switch to only tapping their card when this whole thing is over, that theatres will reopen and that venues will function again.

I also want to talk about teachers. My electorate of Macquarie has a greater number of teachers than any other electorate—schoolteachers in all sectors, TAFE teachers, early childhood teachers and university lecturers. We are bound with them. Teachers at school, in childcare centres and in TAFE are being asked to shoulder an enormous responsibility right now and make invidious choices. Many are older. They're grandparents themselves and in the category considered at higher risk of being more profoundly affected by the coronavirus. Others have their own children and, while they're teaching, they must send their own kids to school or preschool. None of this is ideal, and the confusion of the messages about who should and shouldn't go to school is causing huge anxiety for teachers and parents. I want to thank schools in my electorate—schools like Richmond North Public School and Warrimoo Public School, who have sent parents clear letters saying things like: 'The advice from the New South Wales government is to keep children at home where it is possible to do so. If you can do this, you're encouraged to do so.' That sort of message to parents will make their choices easier.

If we feel it's a good idea for schools in one state to close or for another state to encourage parents to keep their children at home if they can, it's hard to understand why collectively we haven't gone further. If it's a good thing to do next week, it's a very good thing to do this week. Health should come first, and what heroes our health workers are—the thousands of them in the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury. Every single one of them deserves a medal for the work they're doing now and the work we know we are going to ask them to do over the next few months.

Just to finish, I am pleased to see many of our suggestions about aged-care workers and the aged-care sector have been adopted. This is a sector that is going to have a really tough time, and it will need all the help it can get.

On older people, the changes to deeming rates for pensions was another very welcome thing. But I have to say that I am concerned about encouraging younger people to access their super and sell it down at a low point in the market yet, at the same time, we're not allowing retirees to do that because we don't want them selling down at the low point in the market. So I see a contradiction there, and I'm disappointed that we haven't been able to refine that.

We have supported the package. We have not supported the package because it's perfect. We haven't supported it because it is enough. We haven't supported it because there aren't more things that we can do—because there are. We're supporting it because we're a responsible opposition. We do need to work together, and we are willing to compromise and work together. We're supporting it because it's urgent and it's needed. But I hope the government puts actions to its words that there is more to do, because there is, and I hope that everyone, as we
proceed through the next few months, shows kindness and compassion and does everything they can to be a good neighbour.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (18:15): I rise to speak on the Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021 and related bills. The coronavirus poses an unprecedented challenge for Australians, for local communities and for our nation, but we will get through this if we all work together and we all do our bit to stop the spread of the virus. This is an enormous challenge to our healthcare system and those who work in it. And I want to give a very big thank you to all of those, every single person, working in the Australian healthcare sector at the moment—in particular, those who are working at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Randwick, in my community, which has a coronavirus testing centre. Thank you for your courage and for your commitment to helping others and saving lives. I want to particularly pay tribute to those on the front line, especially our doctors and our nurses who are triaging, testing and treating patients for coronavirus. Thank you to the cleaners who are making sure that our hospitals and our GP centres are clean and are saving lives as well. All of those who are risking their health to save others are true heroes, and we thank you.

I want to call on the government to ensure that all healthcare professionals have the resources they need to do their job, particularly testing kits, telehealth measures—and I know the government announced something on that today, which is welcomed—adequate thermometers for testing of temperatures, particularly in hospitals and, of course, personal protective equipment.

Many Australians are confused by the government's response to this pandemic because of the situation with schools. This morning there was mass confusion amongst parents and teachers about the situation relating to Australian schools, because there is no consistent position from Australian government on the issue at the moment—and it's simply not good enough. Last night, in his press conference, the Prime Minister said that schools would remain open. This morning, the Victorian Premier came out and said that Victorian schools would close from tomorrow. Then, literally half an hour after that press conference, the New South Wales Premier did a press conference indicating that, if you could, you should keep your kids at home but schools would be open and students would be able to go there but they won't be taught; they'll just be supervised in online activities.

Our teachers are not babysitters. They deserve better. Parents deserve better from this government in a time of crisis. They deserve a consistent message, and I call on the Prime Minister and the state and territory leaders and those advising them to work together on a unified, consistent message when it comes to schools. The same goes for childcare centres. Many childcare centres are confused about whether or not they should close or whether or not they should remain open and, indeed, what that means for payments into the future. Many parents are wondering whether or not they should voluntarily keep their kids out of childcare centres, and there is uncertainty about payments in respect of support that goes to parents for child care as well. We need to sort these issues out, and sort them out quickly in respect of schools and childcare centres.

This virus will, of course, have a dramatic affect on the Australian economy—on workers and their families and on businesses, particularly small businesses and sole traders. I've spoken to many workers who have been stood down or sacked and to small businesses who are finding it almost impossible to keep staff on and to keep the doors open. To them: I know that you are deeply worried and concerned, I know that you are hurting and I want you to know that my office, my staff and I are here to help you. If you have any issues relating to the economic package that's been announced by the government, please feel free to call my office.

The government has announced a series of stimulus measures aimed at supporting workers, businesses and welfare recipients. In the interests of the nation, to ensure that these measures pass the parliament, Labor will immediately work to ensure that the funds flow to Australians as quickly as possible by voting to support these bills. So Labor will be supporting these bills. Are they adequate? No, they are not. Do they start soon enough? No, they do not. Would Labor have done things differently? Absolutely, yes, we would. But, in the interests of getting this money out the door and ensuring that Australian workers and businesses get the support they need, we will support these bills.

We have concerns with some of the elements of these bills. For instance, they don't start early enough. The $550-per-fortnight coronavirus supplement that was announced yesterday doesn't begin until 27 April—next month! That is too late. It is not soon enough for people who need support immediately. The income test for the jobseeker allowance is still in place, meaning that many Australian workers, sole traders and contractors who are stood down or have lost their jobs will not be eligible, particularly if their partner maintains an income. This will leave millions of Australian households struggling to pay their bills and to make ends meet.

These are unique circumstances. This is not a situation that Australia has ever found itself in before. The government should be relaxing such tests that restrict Australians whose jobs and family incomes are at risk and
who will suffer because of coronavirus. Labor did a similar thing in relaxing those restrictions during the global financial crisis, and it worked. We call on the government to do a similar thing now.

Today we are seeing, as a result of the mass layoffs and standdown of employees, queues outside Centrelink offices. Unfortunately, many of those queuing are going to be disappointed because of some of those restrictions that have been put in place by this government and that remain, the lifting of which should be looked at. I want to thank all of the Centrelink workers who are doing an amazing job today, who have been under very difficult circumstances, working through and ensuring that people get the support they need. But we should be supporting them, and the government should be providing personal protective equipment for those workers as well.

As a result of many workers being stood down or losing their jobs, there will be many who will be unable to pay their mortgage or their rent. I note that the Australian Banking Association made some announcements last week about mortgages, particularly on the major banks offering mortgage deferrals and hardship arrangements. I welcome those announcements. But the critical issue with respect to mortgage deferrals will be whether or not the banks continue to charge interest during that deferral period. If they do, and a person who gets back to making repayments at some stage, when this virus passes, faces the prospect of increases in their repayments, they are again going to struggle to get back on their feet. I call on the banks to clarify this position for many Australian workers and those with mortgages into the future.

The same goes for renters. Many people who are renting who are stood down or lose their jobs will be unable to pay the rent and will face eviction. No-one should be evicted or potentially homeless because of coronavirus. The state and territory governments, I believe, should look at doing what the United Kingdom government has done, and ensure that tenants are protected and that landlords cannot evict tenants during a period into the future until coronavirus passes.

In conclusion, these are challenging times for our nation but we must all work together to ensure that we all do our bit, to make sure that we minimise the spread of this virus. But the government must come up with a consistent message that reflects leadership to ensure that the Australian people can do their bit, to make sure that this virus does not spread.

Mr KHALIL (Wills) (18:25): We have all heard that COVID-19 is an unprecedented health crisis—that's certainly true. We've heard and are now seeing on our TV screens, in our streets and in the supermarkets and feel that this is something that has already affected and will affect all of us right across this country. Here in this place we have our political leaders who tell Australians that we can only get through it by working together, by working for each other. I think that's a truth that's been told in this place: we can only defeat this by working together. That is why we're here. We're here to work with each other, across the political divide, despite our political differences, to serve the people of Australia, the people who we represent, in their hour of need, in this time of need for all of us.

As we know, in any national emergency or health crisis, the key is to move fast, move hard and respond quickly. Even if it's not perfect, we know that having a quick response saves lives. That is the key—that is critical—not just as the health response but also for the economic stimulus that is so important to save peoples' livelihoods. That's why we supported the earlier package of bills and this supply bill that I rise to speak on this evening.

We want solutions to make sure that the response and the solution is the best it can be. Australians are now, and have been for a while, seeking leadership and clear, consistent information from their leaders, from the government. People's lives and jobs depend on it. That's why we have to act together and without delay. We've been very constructive in supporting this package. We've supported the whole package. We've put forward some amendments that we believe make improvements to the package. That's part of our role and part of our responsibility to make this solution, this response, the best it can be. While it's not perfect, it is urgently needed and that is why we have not stood in its way. We have part passed this package, and that's important to note.

We've suggested bringing forward some of the pension payments, the business assistance, more help for students and more help for the arts sector, for teachers and health workers. We welcome the government expanding telehealth, which is a good step forward. We know that all of these things need to be done. We know that Australians are looking at us to make these things happen.

Last night we heard about the range of measures to help flatten the curve. These are measures that will restrict the Australian way of life in many respects, but that's what we mean by working together. That's what we mean by sacrificing for others—sacrificing some of the comforts of our standard of living and our lifestyle just for a few months which we hope will help slow the spread of this virus. We want that to happen because it is critical that we don't have the peak of infections that we have seen in other countries around the world which would overwhelm our health system. That's why we have pushed for these improvements: some pathologists working on tests;
increasing the testing; expanding telehealth as I mentioned—and we thank the government for taking that step; making sure fever clinics are put up now and not in six weeks time; and of course more support for mental health services. As you would know, many Australians, many families and their children, are feeling great levels of distress and stress. It's hard to explain this to kids, and parents are also struggling with this. An important element that we need to address is the mental health support that is needed. I'm here for the people of Wills. We have kept our office open. We're not doing face-to-face meetings—I think we have all stopped those—but we are taking phone calls and we're responding to people and providing the basic information that they need. We're assisting them in any way possible. People can call my office on 9350777 or email me directly at peter.khalil.mp@aph.gov.au, whoever they are, whether they are a small business owner facing an uncertain future; or a parent or carer; or a casual worker who has seen their work dry up for the next six months, or if people are struggling with their rent or their mortgage or don't have a home; or older Australians—the vulnerable elderly Australians that we have seen disadvantaged with all of this and who are also at the greatest risk with all these threats—or someone with a disability or a carer; and also artists—there are many artists in my community, musicians and performers whose livelihoods have come to a halt because of the hit on public places of gathering and the arts sector.

All these people are affected. We're all affected. As I said at the start, we're all in this together. That means we have to work for all the people in our communities and across this country to get through this. That is a truth of what's being said today on all sides of politics: that we must be kind to each other, support each other and work together to get through this. I am here and my office are here and ready to help all the people that I represent in my community and any Australian who needs assistance. That's something we will all be doing for the next few months.

Mr DICK (Oxley) (18:31): We join here in this home of democracy as parliamentarians and representatives of our communities at the most unprecedented of times. We're not standing here as Labor people or Liberals or members of the government or opposition. Each of us is simply standing here as one of 151 people wanting to do the very best in the most desperate of times for our nation. Just by looking around the House and in this building, in the nation's capital, we can see the impact this pandemic is having here on every Australian. It's in the businesses, the schools and the communities across our great country that the devastating effects of this virus are being felt by all Australians, many of whom are facing the most challenging times in their lives. I rise to speak in favour of the Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021 and related bills tonight, and as one of the last speakers in the House of Representatives I do so with great honour and privilege and recognise those members of this place that aren't able to be here for this historic moment, including many of my friends.

I want to bring to attention aspects of the challenges faced by Australians due to the coronavirus and acknowledge particularly those working in our community, particularly in the mighty electorate of Oxley, which I proudly serve. The coronavirus is reminding Australians that we are all connected and we all rely on each other. Australia is built on looking after each other. We may be physically isolated but we are not alone. I want to remind every Australian to be safe and to call a friend, a family member or a neighbour, and let them know you are standing with them.

There are a number of people working on the front line that we heard about in many speeches today. I want to place on record my thanks and acknowledge them. They are heroes: doctors, nurses, paramedics, teachers, childcare workers, shop assistants and particularly those in aged care, who are still heading to work every single day to sacrifice and look after vulnerable Australians.

In my remarks I want to place on record my thanks to members of the Queensland government who are leading the fight against this pandemic, particularly my friend Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk and her government, who have done an outstanding job with their commitment to keep Queenslanders safe during this time. I have known Annastacia for 30 years. I know her compassion, her dedication and her complete resolution to making sure that every single Queenslander remains safe. Queensland is leading the nation. I was so proud to see an outstanding announcement yesterday of $17 million to the University of Queensland School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences to fast-track vaccination research for COVID-19 as an urgent public health priority.

I want to acknowledge members of the government working day and night and the public servants in every office that are fighting this pandemic, particularly the Minister for Health, Steven Miles, and the Minister for State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning, my brother, Cameron Dick, who I know is doing an outstanding job in trying to keep the supply chain going. I want to place on record that I know how proud our parents would be of the work that he's doing.

We're also reminded of how important our fellow trade unions are for the workers. They're the people doing everything to protect our jobs, to provide jobs and to ensure businesses around Australia have the essential
groceries and products Australians need at this time. I want to personally thank them for all their extra efforts at this time, going beyond the call of duty to make sure Australia keeps on going.

By talking to local residents, I know how afraid they are. When it comes to the bills we are speaking of today, I want to first acknowledge the work the government has done so far, but, like my colleagues, I want to emphasise that much more needs to be done much more quickly. It's absolutely imperative we do whatever we can as soon as we can to cushion the blow that the virus will have on the health of Australians and the nation's economy. As our Labor leader, Anthony Albanese, said multiple times over the past week: 'If we know we're going to make a decision in a week’s time, why wait? We must make that decision now.' This can be seen in the amendments passed today that we have moved, alongside the legislation we're dealing with tonight. Make no mistake; Labor will be supporting these measures put forward by the government, but we would be neglecting our duty if we did not emphasise where these can be improved to protect more Australians. Currently, there is nothing, that we know of, that ensures employers will use the money provided by the government to keep Australians employed. Right now, as we speak, hundreds if not potentially thousands of Australians are losing their jobs and many are facing mental health issues as a result of this decision. As such, there must be measures we can make that stipulate that, as part of the contribution made by the government to businesses, they will in turn keep people in their jobs. The more businesses who are able to do this, the more jobs we can save and the more we help Australian families who are doing it tough.

I know the 3,334 traders in the electorate of Oxley and the 6,436 small businesses with turnovers of less than $200,000 are counting on all of us to do the right thing by them. We know some of these measures will not come in until it's too late. This is not good enough, and I will continue to speak on it. The sooner we can get the money to the people who need it, the better. We've seen the long lines of people outside Centrelink today. This shows the urgency and the need for people to access money now. We know that pensioners, the elderly, are worried they won't receive their payments until it's too late. There are around 12,000 people in my electorate who are aged over 70, with many of them living at one of the 17 aged-care facilities in the electorate. I want to make sure that they're protected and looked after as well.

I'm proud to see our local temples, mosques and non-profit support groups come together at this very difficult time and offer support to the community, including many of the hospitality workers—the people who've lost their jobs as of lunchtime today. I pay tribute to the work of the peak bodies. I spoke with the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the hotels industry, particularly those leaders. I know they're turning themselves inside out about their workforce and the hundreds if not thousands of workers that are scared about their future.

I want to particularly offer my support to all of our wonderful churches and places of spiritual worship. I want to acknowledge John Redfern at the Salvation Army in Inala. I want to acknowledge Liza Dykstra of the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Australian Red Cross, who are doing amazing work. I acknowledge Pastor Mark Edwards, at Cityhope Church; Pastors John and Robyn Robertson, at Riverlife Baptist Church; Pastors Phil Cutcliffe, at the Springfield Christian Family church; and those in the Vietnamese Catholic community at St Mark's Catholic Church in my own community of Inala. They're just a sprinkle of the people doing amazing work, such as delivering food hampers, giving assistance, offering a strong message of hope and showing ways to connect in our community.

In closing, I want to ensure that we come to this in the greatest spirit of bipartisanship. I hope our concerns are taken on board, so that we can work together so that we can have no regrets when we look back—that we should have done more. We know and believe as a nation that there is a God looking over all of us. In the Bible, 2 Timothy 1:7 says:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Myself, my office and my staff are here to serve the community and our nation throughout this difficult time so that we can continue to build this beautiful country of Australia, which we call home.

Mr SUKKAR (Deakin—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Housing ) (18:39): I take this opportunity to thank all the members who have contributed to the debate on Supply Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021, Supply Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021 and the Supply (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021. Again, these supply bills seek authority from the parliament for the appropriation of money for the Consolidated Revenue Fund for the first seven months of 2021. The total of the appropriations sought through these three supply bills is just under $83.2 billion. The bills must be passed in this session to ensure funding is available to all entities from 1 July 2020, thereby ensuring the continuity of program and service delivery. The appropriations proposed in these bills are broadly based on seven-twelfths of the estimated 2020-21 annual appropriation, as presented at the 2019-20 budget. They are adjusted for economic and program-specific parameters and the effect of decisions announced as
part of MYEFO or included in the 2019-20 additional estimates appropriations bills, plus of course the COVID-19 related measures. This funding is, therefore, expected to last through until the end of January 2021.

Again, I wish to emphasise that these bills seek provision only to appropriate money to fund government expenditure on an interim basis, until budget appropriation bills have passed. Accordingly, no new measures for the 2020-21 budget are included in these bills. This arrangement allows for the budget appropriation bills to be passed in 2020-21, following the October budget.

Again, I take this opportunity to thank all members for their contribution, and, obviously, those from the opposition for their cooperation and contribution on this debate, and I commend these bills to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a second time.

Third Reading

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Llew O'Brien) (18:42): In accordance with the resolutions agreed to earlier, I now put the question on the third reading of the bills.

Question agreed to.

Bills read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Public Works Committee

Approval of Work

Mr PITT (Hinkler—Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia) (18:43): I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Reserve Bank of Australia Head Office Workplace project, Sydney.

Question agreed to.

Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Membership

Mr PITT (Hinkler—Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia) (18:43): I move:

That:

(1) Ms Sharkie be discharged from the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport and Cities; and

(2) Ms Thwaites be discharged from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit and that, in her place, Mr Conroy be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Leave of Absence

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (18:44): I move:

That leave of absence be given to every Member of the House of Representatives from the determination of this sitting of the House to the date of its next sitting.

Question agreed to.

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (18:45): I present the revised program of sittings for 2020. Copies of the program have been placed on the table. I move:

That the program of sittings for 2020 be agreed to.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (18:45): Leave is granted, in accordance with the resolution, for this to be additional business that we deal with. I'll want to speak on it.

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (18:45): I thank the Manager of Opposition Business. The alterations to the sitting calendar that have been proposed this evening relate, in large part, to the fact that last week the Prime Minister noted that putting budgets together at this time, with the enormous uncertainty that exists in predicting, anticipating and estimating economic parameters, is not something that any Commonwealth or state government should be doing. Indeed, those governments have, in
effect, decided not to put together budgets at what is the usual time in or about May. The Treasurer has noted that forecasting for budgets is very difficult at the best of times, let alone when we're in the midst of the economic uncertainty that we are experiencing at the moment. As a result, as members would be aware, the government have decided that we will not be handing down a budget until the first Tuesday in October, being 6 October. Earlier today, the House agreed to necessary measures on supply and other continuances to ensure the proper functioning of government services and the continuation of vital programs to ensure the government does not need to pass the budget in May.

I note that I understand there's likely to be a division with respect to the sitting calendar. Something else that has played in the government's mind is that, whilst we've run today's session very efficiently and with great cooperation, some risk attaches to the operation of parliament, particularly during what is anticipated to be the peak point in the transmission of the coronavirus. Obviously, we come from all points in Australia. We've done our level best today, I think, to conduct this session and today's sittings with all of the appropriate social distancing that has been recommended for Australia at large. Nevertheless, some risk attaches to flying in multiple members from every corner in Australia, and some attention to that fact has been had in redesigning the sitting calendar that is now before the House.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (18:47): The opposition will be opposing the changes to the sitting calendar, while we acknowledge that there are some changes that do need to be made.

Clearly, when the government announces that the budget will be held at a different time then that needs to be reflected in a revised calendar, and the government has done that here. What the government has also done, though, is eliminate any sittings during May and June. It may well be that by the time we get to May and June we find that we can't sit. If that's the case then it is entirely the prerogative of the government to give advice to the Speaker that they believe the sitting needs to be cancelled. We have, previously, cancelled a week of sittings based on the fact that the member for New England at the time was before the High Court. There were two by-elections on, it was going to change the numbers on the floor, and a week of sittings was suddenly cancelled. If we can do it in those circumstances when it needs to happen then we can do it with respect to a pandemic, if we get there, and it needs to happen.

The reason the opposition believes that we shouldn't make that decision today is that, as everyone is acknowledging, we don't know where we will be in May or June, and the presumption should be that the parliament will sit. The presumption should be that we will meet if it is possible for us to sit, because, during this period, during a time of crisis, is when the Australian public needs us to sit. I will be more than surprised if we can go from now until August and find that the legislation we put through the parliament today is all the nation needs for Australia to handle this pandemic, all the nation needs to deal with the crisis of unemployment and recession that we'll be facing. That means we will need to sit, so we shouldn't pretend that we won't. It also means during this period the government will be compelled in the interests of the nation to make some decisions of great magnitude. That will happen. We know that will happen; that's part of the story behind the supply bills that have just passed. To have decisions of that magnitude being made without the parliament convening and without there being a question time and an opportunity for people representing the different corners of Australia to hold the government to account is an unwise course for us to take.

I won't detain the House longer than that, but I will simply remind us: if we find that in some way, for health reasons, there is a difficulty in the parliament meeting, there are resolutions that we will deal with later today to make sure that we are still able to meet as a parliament. And that's all being done with a full level of cooperation and good common sense between me and the Leader of the House. Of all the decisions that have been made procedurally, this is the only one where we have disagreement. Let's not forget, in terms of legislation, some of what we dealt with in legislation today was only announced and determined by the Australian government yesterday. It is unthinkable that we will make it through to 11 August without the nation needing us to convene. It may well be that in addition to May and June we find we're back here in July. It may be that before we even get to when we are meant to sit in May, in April or even later this month we may find there is an emergency reason that we need to sit. I have to say I have no confidence that the plans that have been made in the government's narrative of keeping people in work are going to keep people in work. The apprentices one, for those numbers, as a direct wage subsidy, may well be able to do it, but, for the others—and I said in an earlier speech—I'm just not confident that that's how it's going to unfold. I'm simply not confident.

I hope, we all hope, that what's been announced today and what's gone through the parliament today is enough, but I would be deeply surprised if it is. Therefore, in us opposing the sitting calendar, we're simply saying to the government: keep the presumptions of the dates that we are here in May and June. If we need to meet earlier than that, we will cooperate with that. If the sittings, when we get to those dates, mean that we find the parliament can't sit, then the usual communication between the government and the Speaker will cause those sittings to be
cancelled at the time. But to presume that we don't need to be back here until 11 August defies logic, defies common sense and is something that the Labor Party, the opposition, cannot support.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (18:53): The Greens can't support the cancellation of sitting weeks in advance when we don't know where we're going to be at that stage, we don't know what's going to be required of us as MPs or of the government and we don't know how the government's stimulus package is going to play out. We've just passed, in a very short period of time, with very little scrutiny and very little notice, legislation to give the government the authority to spend an enormous amount of money and to make an enormous amount of changes, and that has happened in this parliament because there is a recognition from everyone in this place that we are confronting a crisis and we are confronting an emergency and urgent steps need to be taken. But it is because it is so unprecedented, because so many changes have been made, because such a large amount of money is going to be spent and because there is so much at stake—so many lives at stake, so many livelihoods at stake, so many jobs at stake and so many people who don't have work so their livelihoods are at stake as well—that we need the capacity to work out whether more changes need to be made, whether we got it right or whether we got it wrong.

In the short period of time that we've had, we've already been able to identify a number of areas where the government has left people behind. We've already found that carers, for example, are not going to get the coronavirus supplement. The people on disability support pension are not going to get it and the people who are studying are not going to get it. I asked the government earlier what's the rationale for that and they didn't have one; the minister just sat there in silence. They didn't have one and that is probably because there isn't one and probably because this has been rushed. I understand the circumstances for rushing it but, in rushing things, governments can make mistakes. We've already been able to identify people who have been left behind in sectors like hospitality and tourism. There are no specific packages for them. There are big gaps, for example, in the continued requirements around mutual obligation for people receiving social security payments. We just haven't had the time, because we've all agreed to come here in good faith and work on this on an urgent basis, to work out exactly who's been left behind and what more will be needed.

A part of the reason, certainly from our perspective, that we were willing to engage in this in good faith and say to the government, 'Yes, we accept this needs to be done and done quickly,'—even though we would do it differently—was there were further sitting weeks scheduled in the not-too-distant future that could give us a chance, after being with our constituents and seeing how this is playing out, to come back and say, 'Look, some changes are needed. We need to look after students and give them the coronavirus supplement because too many of them have now lost so much money they can't afford their rent; they're in dire straits.' We thought we would have the chance to come back to argue, to plug some of the gaps and, I suspect, to have to massively increase the level of stimulus that will be required.

If it turns out that in a few weeks' time it is not safe for parliament to sit then it must be within our wit to be able to work out alternative ways of making such decisions if we need to. There's been a good deal of goodwill and co-operation here today, people's safety has been a priority as well and we've been able to balance that. If further urgent decisions need to be made then, surely, we should be able to work out how to make them if parliament has to be cancelled. But the starting point in an emergency is to have more democracy, not less. The presumption that simply because there is a crisis we should cancel parliament is a worrying one. Yes, we should definitely impose restrictions if safety requires it. If it is putting people at risk for us all to come here and meet again because that is what the health advice says then, of course, let's listen to the health advice. But that's not the basis on which this is being put forward, so we can't support a change that automatically removes another several months of opportunity to debate and improve the package, scrutinise the government spending and hold the government to account. The fact that the government's already made mistakes and left people behind does not give us that requisite confidence. We thought we'd have the opportunity to come back after talking to our constituents and tidy up gaps. The removal of that opportunity is not one that we can support. And it is, I must say, concerning that one of the first responses of the government in this is to cancel the opportunity for scrutiny. Yes, by all means let's cancel parliament on a week-by-week basis if that turns out to be the medical advice, but the Greens cannot support the cancellation of parliament in advance, especially at a time of emergency.

Dr CHALMERS (Rankin) (18:58): Thank you for the opportunity to add to the compelling points made by the member for Melbourne and also especially those made by the member for Watson before him. Clearly the idea that the parliament won't need to sit until August is absurd. When you think about the rapidly evolving nature of this health crisis, when you think about the rapidly deteriorating economy, which is coming as a consequence of that diabolical challenge to our health system, to think that we won't need to agree new measures or we won't need to, as the member for Melbourne said, scrutinise the measures which were only announced yesterday and
legislated today, the idea that the government has just perfectly nailed every aspect of this $66 billion in new spending is absurd.

As others have pointed out, it would be one thing if the government came to us and said, 'On the basis of health advice'—or some other reason—'we think that the parliament shouldn't sit on a rolling fortnightly basis,' but the idea that we can just assume that the parliament need not sit until August just doesn't make sense. If those opposite can say to us that they have every aspect of this package right or that they know, in every way, how this economic crisis is going to unfold, that's another thing. But they can't do that, for obvious and understandable reasons.

The other point I wanted to make is that it's not the Labor Party on its own that is saying that there will be more that will need to be done. Yesterday, before the government even released its second package of stimulus, the finance minister was on early morning TV saying, 'We will need a third wave of stimulus.' By the time the Treasurer and the Prime Minister stood up in the Prime Minister's courtyard later that day, they weren't just talking about a third wave of stimulus but a fourth and a fifth and subsequent waves of stimulus. We've made our views on that well known—that we also think that additional support will be necessary. If we know now that that additional support is necessary, then let's get cracking on it. The parliament will not be sitting for much longer in this session. So if there are to be subsequent waves of stimulus, for good, well-founded reasons—that the economy deteriorates further and that more lives and livelihoods are destroyed—then we need to have the capacity for the parliament to sit and agree, as we have today, on the necessary measures to support the economy and to support people, in particular, in that deteriorating economy. So, for all of the reasons that the member for Watson identified and all of the reasons that the member for Melbourne identified, it makes no sense for us not to sit until August in terms of the economic considerations.

There will be problems with what the government has proposed. From the announcement of the package until the passage through this place, it has only been 27 or 28 hours. There was $66 billion outlaid, plus the original $17 billion. So $83 billion of taxpayer money was outlaid with very little notice. We've done our best to work through the legislation that we were provided and we've done our best to come to a good, sound judgement on that legislation. We support it and we want to get it out the door as soon as possible. But the idea that there is nothing in there that might need to be fixed or tweaked doesn't make a lot of sense to us.

The economy is in serious strife, for all of the reasons that we in this place know and have spent today talking about. As a democracy, as the people's house of the Australian parliament, we need to give ourselves the capacity to do more and to fix, improve and tweak what has already been done. If we agree here that we are not going to sit until August, we rob ourselves of that opportunity to do the right thing by the people who sent us here.

**The SPEAKER**: The question is that the motion moved by the Leader of the House be agreed to.

The House divided. [19:07]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes ............... 48
Noes ............... 37
Majority .......... 11

**AYES**

Allen, K 
Andrews, KL 
Chester, D 
Connelly, V 
Evans, TM 
Fletcher, PW 
Frydenberg, JA 
Hogan, KJ 
Hunt, GA 
Kelly, C 
Leeser, J 
Littleproud, D 
Martin, FB 
McIntosh, MI 
Morton, B 
O'Brien, T 
Porter, CC 
Robert, SR 
Sharma, DN 
Steggall, Z 
Tehan, DT 
Andrews, KJ 
Buchholz, S 
Conaghan, PJ 
Drum, DK (teller) 
Falinski, JG 
Flint, NJ (teller) 
Gee, AR 
Howarth, LR 
Joyce, BT 
Laming, A 
Ley, SP 
Liu, G 
McCormack, MF 
Morrison, SJ 
O'Brien, LS 
Pitt, KJ 
Price, ML 
Sharkie, RCC 
Simmonds, J 
Sukkar, MS 
van Manen, AJ
AYES
Vasta, RX
Wilson, TR
Young, T
Wallace, AB
Wood, JP
Zimmerman, T

NOES
Albanese, AN
Bandt, AP
Bird, SL
Bowen, CE
Burke, AS
Butler, MC
Chalmers, JE
Clare, JD
Claydon, SC
Conroy, PM
Dick, MD
Fitzgibbon, JA
Freelander, MR
Georganas, S
Giles, AJ
Gosling, LJ
Haines, H
Hayes, CP
Hill, JC
Husic, EN
Jones, SP
Khalil, P
King, CF
Leigh, AK
Marles, RD
Mulino, D
O’Connor, BPJ
O’Neil, CE
Payne, AE
Ryan, JC (teller)
Shorten, WR
Smith, DPB
Stanley, AM (teller)
Templeman, SR
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Watts, TG
Zappia, A

Question agreed to.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Parliamentary Arrangements

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (19:10): On a matter involving the whips: a large number of members who have been paired have been raising that they wanted their names recorded in Hansard as pairs, as an indication that they wanted to be here. I think the whips had a fair bit of trouble stopping some members from being here and getting down to the required numbers.

A government member interjecting—

Mr BURKE: That's right; the reverse of what we normally expect whips to do. Members don't all need to stay for it, but, so that it gets recorded in Hansard, I wonder whether on indulgence you could allow the government whip and then the opposition whip to read the names of the pairs into Hansard, so that in good faith we've made that point clear to them.

The SPEAKER (19:11): I think that's a good course of action. I'll grant indulgence, first of all, to the Chief Government Whip.

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde—Chief Government Whip) (19:11): Firstly, I'd like to thank colleagues on both sides of the chamber, who have contributed to making the chamber work today by their absence. I'd like to acknowledge those members and put their names on the record: the member for Aston, the member for Hasluck, the member for Dickson, the member for Swan, the member for Forrest, the member for O'Connor, the member for Canning, the member for Moore, the member for Herbert, the member for Barker, the member for Hume, the member for Dawson, the member for Groom, the member for Grey, the member for Robertson, the member for Capricornia, the member for Sturt, the member for Lyne, the member for Moncrieff, the member for Bennelong, the member for Banks, the member for Flynn, the member for Parkes, the member for Mallee, the member for Leichhardt, the member for Mitchell, the member for Braddon, the member for Bass, the member for Monash and the member for Curtin. To all those colleagues I would like to say thanks for their cooperation and for assisting their colleagues in the House in general. I would also like to acknowledge the Chief Opposition Whip and the colleagues on the other side of the chamber, who also assisted in this process and thank them for their forbearance and assistance.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (19:13): I would like to thank the following members for their cooperation in allowing me to provide pairs to the government and to accommodate the social-distancing arrangements that applied in the House today. I name the following members: the member for Cowan, the member for Macnamara, the member for Barton, the member for Griffith, the member for Holt, the member for
Spence, the member for Bendigo, the member for Corangamite, the member for Franklin, the member for Isaacs, the member for Richmond, the member for Cooper, the member for Eden-Monaro, the member for Burt, the member for Brand, the member for Lyons, the member for McEwen, the member for Dunkley, the member for Blair, the member for Parramatta, the member for Moreton, the member for Gilmore, the member for Sydney, the member for Kingston, the member for Greenway, the member for Lingiari, the member for Paterson, the member for Jagajaga, the member for Calwell, the member for Lilley and the member for Dobell.

Sitting suspended from 19:15 to 22:57

BILLS

Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Bill 2020

Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with an amendment.

Ordered that the amendment be considered immediately.

Senate's amendment—

(1) Schedule 11, Part 1, page 66 (after line 9), at the end of the Part, add:

40A Modifications of qualifications and payments under the social security law

(1) For any provision of the social security law relating to the qualification of persons for a social security payment, or to the rate of a social security payment, the Minister may, by, legislative instrument, determine:

(a) for a provision that relates to the qualification of persons for a social security payment:
   (i) that the provision is varied as specified in the determination; or
   (ii) that the provision does not apply; or
   (iii) that the provision does not apply and that another provision specified in the determination applies instead; or

(b) for a provision that relates to the rate of a social security payment:
   (i) that the provision is varied as specified in the determination; or
   (ii) that the provision does not apply and that a rate of payment specified in the determination applies instead.

(2) The Minister must be satisfied that the determination is in response to circumstances relating to the coronavirus known as COVID-19.

(3) A determination under this item has effect accordingly.

(4) In this item:

   social security law has the same meaning as in the Social Security Act 1991.

   social security payment has the same meaning as in the Social Security Act 1991.

(5) An instrument made under this item has no operation after 31 December 2020.

(6) This item is repealed on 31 December 2020.

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Treasurer) (22:57): I move:

That the amendment be agreed to.

I thank the House for its support across both sides of the political aisle. The measures that have been passed by the parliament today represent the most significant support for the Australian economy and community since the war. There is much to do for this country in the weeks and months ahead, but working together we can support the Australian community in their moment of need. Thank you.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (22:58): The opposition is very happy to support the amendments that have been made in the Senate. I note that some of it has come out of direct consultation that the Leader of the Opposition has undertaken with the Prime Minister and with the Treasurer. Today has been a good example of the parliament at its best, working at a time when the nation is facing some of its worst. If we find that we need to be here again earlier than has been scheduled, then I think the demeanour and the determination of all members of parliament will be exactly as they have been today.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (22:58): The Australian Greens support this amendment and we thank the government for making it. One of the needs that it responds to is the particular position of students on youth allowance, who will now be able to have the coronavirus payment extended to them. We're hopeful that the other provisions of this amendment over the coming months might also be extended to other income recipients who are also in similar need.

Question agreed to.
BIZINESS

Days and Hours of Meeting

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (22:59):

I move:

That:

(1) the House may meet in a manner and form not otherwise provided in the standing orders with the agreement of the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business, with the manner in which Members may be present (including for the purposes of achieving a quorum) to be determined by the Speaker; and

(2) any consequent changes to the rules and orders necessary to enable such a meeting to commence may be determined by agreement of the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business.

The two motions that we, the government, move, are both being moved with the support of the opposition and are being moved to ensure that the parliament retains the necessary flexibility to respond to any upcoming challenges that it and the nation may face. The first motion that I have just read relates to the proposed change to sessional orders, whilst the second motion will seek to amend standing order 47(c)(ii).

In light of the current circumstances I thought it would be relevant to provide a short explanation of the context and potential purpose of the motions for the benefit of the House. Today's proceedings have been somewhat unconventional but very effective and conducted with great cooperation. I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his cooperation in the procedural conduct of today and for his and the opposition's cooperation, assistance and suggestions in the drafting of the two changes that I am now addressing.

The unconventional aspects of today were required and necessary because of the extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances that have arisen by way of the health effects and subsequent economic and administrative changes that have arisen in response to the onset of the coronavirus in Australia. Indeed, the form of today's proceedings would not have been anticipated nor considered necessary a matter of only two weeks ago.

The Governor-General has made a human biosecurity emergency declaration under section 475 of the Biosecurity Act 2015. It is possible that a human biosecurity emergency period could be extended beyond its initial three-month term. Although it is not possible to know each and every contingency for which our nation and our nation's parliament will now need to plan, we do know that we need to plan for uncertainty. The only rule of planning that remains certain in the presently uncertain environment is that it remains a consistently sound approach to plan to achieve the best outcome while also planning to mitigate and cope with worst-case scenarios.

The operation of parliament, its endurance and resilience, has in large part been anchored in its flexibility within the known parameters of proper and necessary procedure to cope with and adapt to changed circumstances. Accordingly, these two motions are a measured and sensible approach designed to provide in the most tempered way the requisite degree of flexibility that may reasonably be required. Further, without altering in any way the accepted or statutory requirements of matters such as the number of members constituting quorum or altering any of the clear and accepted requirements regarding a meeting of the parliament, these changes are designed simply to provide a mechanism by which agreement between the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business, with the concurrence of the Speaker, might provide for the sort of flexibility we have observed today, by allowing for the alteration, for a period, of the standing orders, or orders to the extent that may become necessary to allow for the proper functioning of our parliament in what might be greatly changed circumstances, without being able to anticipate every single limiting circumstance that may arise while the period of biosecurity remains in force.

I might just add that, having spoken very briefly with the crossbench about these matters, they are meant to be facilitative. They are anticipating a set of circumstances where we may not have enough members for parliament, rather than intending to exclude any member of parliament, which would of course be unconstitutional. It is impossible, and not in the anticipation nor intent of government or the opposition.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (23:03): I want to support the two motions.

Mr Porter: I haven't moved the second yet, but I'm happy to move that now.

Mr BURKE: I will only speak to the one that has been moved. I support these for the same reason that I opposed the change to the sitting calendar, in that I have no doubt that, over this winter, we're going to be coming back. We might get lucky and we won't need to, but, with the pace at which everything's moving, I just find it really hard to believe that everything that we've done up until today will be all we need to do all the way through to August. In the last few days we've seen state after state start to lock themselves down. I don't know how much further that will go, but it is not impossible to imagine a scenario where, for the parliament to meet, we have to get here 14 days early, self-isolate, meet, go back home and then self-isolate again for another 14 days. We're not
there yet; we certainly haven't had to do that today. But if the nation needs us to meet, and needs us to meet quickly, we need to have a level of flexibility in how that might happen.

A few weeks ago I would've been opposed to what is in front of us right now, and I view it very much as a break-glass option, if it is required. As the resolution puts a particular responsibility on myself and the Leader of the House when dealings with matters of manner and form, I give a guarantee to the crossbench—and, obviously, to my own side—that direct consultation on that would take place before anything was agreed to. The presumption on agreeing to anything would be this: it would be with the intention of making sure that members who were otherwise excluded could participate. The best that we can do is for us to physically meet here, like we have today, and we'll do everything we can to form a quorum with a significant number of people, the way we have done today. If circumstances mean we have to look at a different manner and form, we will deal with that in a very conservative fashion and a very careful fashion but certainly with the intention of making sure that, when the Australian people need the parliament to meet, the parliament can meet.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne—Leader of the Australian Greens) (23:06): I thank the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business for their discussions about this motion, before coming to the chamber and in the chamber. The Leader of the House did accurately reflect the concern that we had, which is that, on the face of it, the motion could appear to be restrictive, when it comes to manner and form, as to who is able to attend or the conditions under which they're able to attend and/or the rights that they might have, should they attend. Reading that together with the quorum requirement, we wanted to ensure that we're not in a position where arrangements might be made for a meeting of the parliament with 10 from either side and no members of the crossbench, or something similar.

We of course understand that, as we enter these times, there will be a need to be flexible. If we can move and explore ways of meeting online or via teleconferencing, that is something that we would welcome, because that would ensure that the parliament is able to continue to meet in times and ways that might be unusual. But we take at face value and thank the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business for the commitment that it is not intended to be restrictive and in fact couldn't be restrictive. That certainly does gives us a bit more comfort than we had—speaking for myself, at least—on reading the terms of the motion as they appear on face value.

Question agreed to.

Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Leader of the House) (23:07): I move:

That standing order 47(c)(ii) be amended to read as follows:

(ii) can be carried only by an absolute majority of Members, or by a majority of Members present if agreed by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business.

As I foreshadowed, this is a change to the standing orders. It might operate in tandem with the change to the sessional orders that we have just moved, or it might operate independently. Just by way of a structural explanation, the motion amends standing orders to change the way that an absolute majority is needed for a suspension of standing orders. Members are aware that, in order to suspend standing orders, an absolute majority must be achieved if the motion is without notice. An absolute majority in this current parliament is 76. There may be circumstances—and I think they have been highlighted today in the proceedings—in the present environment where the House may not be able to form an absolute majority of 76. An absolute majority can become very important if the House meets and is required for any accepted reason to suspend standing orders in order to achieve an outcome like those that have changed today's proceedings. This motion would amend the standing order to allow for a situation where the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business could agree that they would be able to allow for a suspension of standing orders to be passed without an absolute majority and, rather, by a simple majority of members present. I believe that change is important, and it may be a necessary mechanism—again, one we would hope not to use, or to use only very rarely, but one that it is prudent to have available to the House. Again, I thank the Manager of Opposition Business for his co-operation in the drafting of this motion and the earlier motion, which I've already read.

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (23:09): I thank the Leader of the House for moving this and the cooperation and consultation that's gone on with everything about today—this motion included, which has been going on for quite some time. To put it in the most practical terms, for today's sitting we had 30 pairs a side. The reason we couldn't do more than 30 pairs a side was that we had to make sure we had 76 people here to be able to suspend standing orders, as the first thing we did today.

We may be in a situation in the weeks to come when we sit where we automatically are getting more than 30 people a side who can't get here. This would allow in those circumstances that a suspension still could be carried
in a circumstance where the opposition and the government agree. So, if you simply imagine that all the processes that happened today would have been impossible if more than 30 a side had been unable to get here, this will mean that that then becomes possible again—once again, something that we hope won't need to be used and certainly would operate quite separately to the other. It could be used at the same time, but it's not necessarily connected to the sessional order that we dealt with a moment ago. Again, thank you, Mr Speaker and the Leader of the House.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 23:11 until a date and hour to be fixed by the Speaker, in accordance with the resolution agreed to this day.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Defence Procurement
(Question No. 282)

Mr Conroy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 4 February 2020:
In respect of the Defence capability acquisition project Amphibious Ships (JNT02048PH4A):
(1) What was the project's approved date of final operational capability.
(2) What is the project's current forecast date of final operational capability.

Mr Dutton: The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the member's question:
(1) November 2016 (forecast at approval in June 2007)
(2) November 2019 (achieved)

Centrelink
(Question No. 310)

Ms Sharkie asked the Minister for Government Services, in writing, on 12 February 2020:
Did the Department of Human Services supplement Centrelink employee numbers for the purposes of responding to bushfires during the period 1 December 2019 to 31 January 2020 by engaging private contractors; if so:
(a) how many private contractors were engaged in each state on a full time equivalent basis;
(b) what labour hire company or companies were chosen by the department to provide additional staff to Centrelink; and
(c) for each state, what was the cost to the department for engaging private contractors in Centrelink, and what was the total cost.

Mr Robert: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
Services Australia did not supplement its existing workforce for the purpose of responding to bushfires during the period 1 December 2019 to 31 January 2020 by engaging private contractors.