



29th of October, 2021

Hi there,

Welcome to our revamped, extended and enriched newsletter that marks our return to social media after a three-week pause caused by the vile and violent abuse I and my staff were enduring.

Isn't it lovely to feel the surge, the lift in community spirits as people burst out of lockdown? The relief and joy are palpable.

And the massive effort by the people of Victoria to become fully vaccinated means we can reasonably hope, even expect, that further blanket lockdowns will not be needed, particularly if those eligible get a booster jab. More on that in a sec.

In a nutshell, here's where we are: Loneliness bites amid pandemic fights, vile slights & criminal nights. So. Let's go.



This week in Parliament, I ...

- supported a motion for more [committee oversight of the government's Covid response](#).
- called for a [hydromorphone trial](#) that would replace illegally obtained heroin with a prescription medication.
- asked the government to consider whether [funding for health services in prisons](#) is adequate.
- paid tribute to [Dr Rodney Syme](#), without whom, legislation for voluntary assisted dying would not have been possible.
- urged the government to not leave VCAL students behind in new reforms.
- called for [research into hemp varieties](#) which can be treated like any other crop, not like a drug.
- met with the hemp taskforce to examine the current opportunities in supporting the industry and begin work on our report.
- sought clarity in [legislation which modernises liquor laws](#) to include delivery drivers.
- asked the government to reinstate the cancelled [Rising Festival](#).



THE LONELINESS EPIDEMIC

Not everyone has bounced back out with gusto and a grin, though. Tragically, far from it. We are traversing a Covid pandemic, but we are experiencing an ongoing loneliness epidemic. [This report](#) sets out the problem. And proposes some solutions. It finds the Government has failed to implement any longer-term solutions.

Next week Reason Party and I will launch a campaign to raise awareness of this silent mass killer – loneliness is a as big, if not bigger, threat as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and obesity, research has shown the world over.

As we come out of the pandemic, the community needs to be aware of loneliness and be given tools to combat it.



PANDEMIC PANDEMONIUM

Parliament is debating pandemic-specific legislation to allow for further, targeted and limited public health responses, to replace the State of Emergency set to end in mid-December. There has been a shrill, overreaction; some people are falsely and, I must say, rather ignorantly mischaracterising the mooted move as some Machiavellian “grab for power”.

It is not. I am going through the Bill line by line. The Opposition leapt to hyperbolic rejection of it before even having read it. That’s cynical and irresponsible.

I will seek to amend it should need be – for example, I think some the penalties for individuals might need adjusting, and some definitions may be too broad.

But the crucial point is that Victoria is going to lead the other states and territories in replacing SOE powers with rules that vastly increase transparency and accountability, something I have been calling for more than a year. Other states are just continually extending their SOE month-by-month.

FINALLY, THE BUCK IS GUNNA STOP WITH THE PREMIER

At last, the Government can no longer hide its decisions and responsibility behind “medical advice”. At last, we shall all be able to see, in real time, all the advice behind public-health decisions.

At last, the buck stops with the Premier and Health Minister, as it should have all along, rather than with unelected officials – notwithstanding their ability and focus on the public interest.

My simple question to those who are misunderstanding this proposal is: if you don’t want the Premier and Health Minister accountable for these decisions, who might you prefer?



A giant of a man has left us for ever. And left us a monumental legacy.

Dr Rodney Syme, without whom Victoria would not have passed voluntary assisted dying laws, died in recent days after a stroke 10 days earlier. He was 86.

Those laws are some the finest ever to come out of this place. He fought for decades for a law that gives terminally ill people very close to death and in agony the dignity of choice.

The people of Victoria are the beneficiaries of Rodney Syme's advocacy, activism, and legacy.

Rodney, at massive risk to himself, openly stated he had been helping many such people for a long time. His moral conviction was unimpeachable.

At his end, he chose to take no food or water after the stroke that felled him. He was a humble giant in our community, and known across the world for his determination, gentleness, and courage.

Think of what a human should be. Rodney Syme was that, and I was blessed by his friendship and mentorship.

I shared on Instagram my message to Rodney in his final days. Watch [here](#).

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The power of hemp

Hemp is a plant with stupendous potential as old-growth forestry winds down, as has been explained here before. I have asked the Agriculture Minister to commission research into varieties of the plant best-suited to our climate.

Hemp is not cannabis. It is the sober cousin of cannabis. Industrial hemp crops can be grown three times a year. Timber plantations require thirty years for one crop.

Not only can hemp replace most building and timber products, including concrete, there are also profitable opportunities in food, beverage, cosmetics and pet food.



Thoughts from Robbie Swan: Rocks are melting

...well they're getting lubed up a bit anyway.

Who would have ever thought in their wildest dreams that the scion of Christian values for the Northern Metropolitan region and the man who crosses himself

after every reading of the Lord's Prayer in parliament - Liberal MLC, Craig Ondarchie - would rise in his seat to support the woman recently dubbed 'Satan's Little Helper' by his Liberal colleague Bernie Finn. The issue? Whether advertising that was directly or indirectly 'sexual' in nature should be allowed to promote alcohol sales.

Yep, it happened on Thursday night as the Upper House debated amendments to the Liquor Control Reform Amendment Bill 2021. Fiona's amendment was to get rid of the word 'sexual' alongside the words, 'sexist' and 'degrading' in defining advertising that would be unacceptable for a liquor outlet to use.

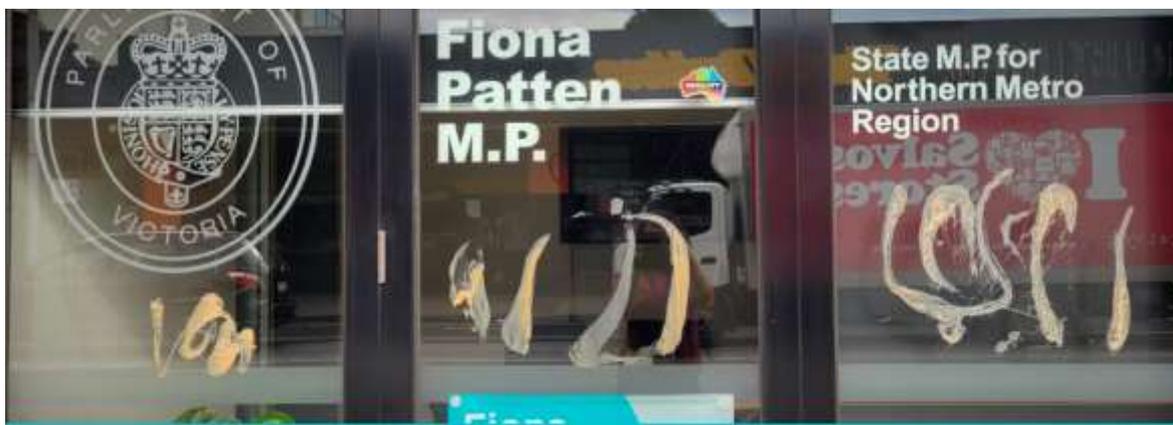
'Sexual' Fiona argued, was not a pejorative term in its own right, unlike the other two and should be allowed. LGBTIQ advertising could intrinsically be seen as 'sexual' and a couple holding hands in a certain way and looking longingly into each other's eyes could be seen as sexual. Even a candlelit dinner for two could be sexual depending on what happened after the meal.

Labor's Sean Leane tried valiantly to defend it saying the word was used in the Liquor licensing legislation in all other states.

Fiona was having none of it.

And then... the unthinkable. Ondarchie rose, colossus-like on the crimson velvet and declared that he could never have believed he would do such a thing but his party would be supporting Ms Patten's amendment. Again he dissembled... 'I can't believe I'm doing this'. And yet he did. No doubt his next confession flashed before his eyes and his wagging Nonna's finger weighed heavily on his mind.

So why did he do it? Why did the party of the Australian Christian Lobby land on the side of night club owners and sly grog sellers? Only Ondarchie knows.



Shout out to a Good Samaritan

Last week, my office was vandalised during the night by masked criminals. Again. The next morning, some wonderful person removed the hideous words, hoping to protect me and my staff, and the public, from the words in this jarring attack. You know who you are. Thank you.

Back from blackout

The very same morning this kind and compassionate person acted, we recorded a video for the end of the social media pause. It's a great way to communicate with constituents – but we'll be limiting the access to comments on our posts.

It's been a gruelling few years. For everyone. We are making a plea for people to treat themselves and each other with kindness and compassion.

WARNING: The video is raw and painful to watch, but we wanted people to see, hear, feel and understand just how awful the abuse is. Here it is.

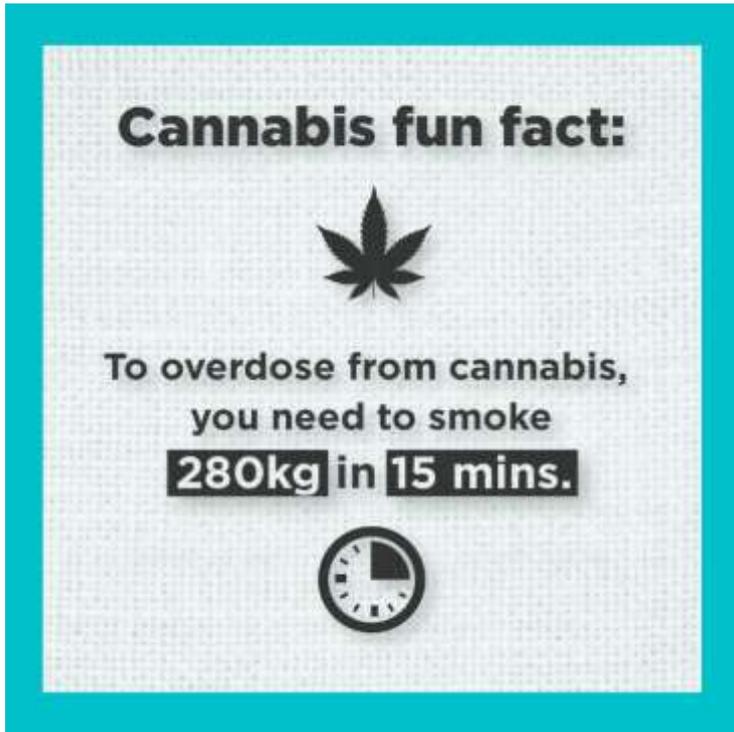


Local music showcase!

The pandemic has devastated the live music industry. I have been calling for more support for venues, but our musicians need help too. In support of Alex Lahey's open letter to the federal government asking for a wage subsidy for the industry, every week I will buy a record or shirt from a local musician.

This week I treated myself to Cahill Kelly's debut album, '**Classical and Cool Jazz**'. Cahill is a Melbourne-based singer-songwriter and trust me, his sublime indie-folk vibes are just what you need this weekend.





Song of the week goes out to Crown Royal Commissioner, Ray Finkelstein, who was scathing in his report, but ultimately did not recommend that Crown should lose their license. [Take it away, Kenny.](#)

We'll be producing this newsletter/newspaper every fortnight. We are determined to have at least one item in here of interest and/or entertainment for every reader.

Take care of yourselves and each other,

Fiona