



*18<sup>th</sup> of December, 2020*

Hi there,

Here's an update on politics and news across the Northern Metropolitan Region.

In this issue — legislation amended to enable victims to speak out, the inquiry into contact tracing commenced this week, RSL pokies are negatively impacting veterans, safety at the new Bell Station and COVID fines for children are unjust.

**COVID-19 UPDATES:**

49 🍌 days in a row today! Check [here](#) for the most up-to-date information and advice from Victoria's Chief Health Officer, and check [here](#) for travel advice for NSW.



## The Reason Coalition

A couple of weeks ago, I stood on the banks of the Murray River with Member for

Mildura, Ali Cupper, to announce the Reason Coalition — a new way of doing politics. By joining forces, we strongly believe that we will add strength to each other's arm and exponentially increase what we can achieve.

The divide between regional and metropolitan areas need not exist, as the challenges we face are very similar. Issues like public and mental health, drug and alcohol treatment, homelessness and problem gambling are issues which affect all of us as Victorians.

As a result of this coalition, Reason will now have a voice in the lower house, where the Premier sits. By the same token, the constituents of Mildura will have a voice in the upper house, where legislation is reviewed, and that can only be a good thing.



## Regional rate reform

Last week in Parliament I asked my first question in question time for the Reason Coalition and we are already seeing results. Inequity in regional rates have been an issue for many years and it's about time the government did something about it.

I was pleased to hear that the Local Government Minister, Mr Leane, promised to take action on this important issue for people in the regions.

You can read or watch my question [here](#).



## My Bill to stamp out preference harvesting

Last month, I introduced the Electoral Act Amendment (Preference Harvesting) Bill 2020. The legislation aims to make it illegal for a person to be paid by multiple parties or candidates to coordinate group voting tickets, a practice that has been criticised for electing candidates that secured less than 1 per cent of the vote.

It will force parties to broker their own deals and earn their seat — rather than benefiting through costly backroom deals.

At Victorian elections, most people vote "above the line" for upper house candidates rather than numbering their first-to-last preferences for individual candidates, and allow the party to distribute their preferences according to their group voting ticket. Currently, individuals are making considerable sums of money by bringing small parties together to preference each other, allowing them to lift their votes above larger, more popular parties as preferences are distributed.

People should not be able to buy their way into parliament, but effectively, that is what has been happening. The public are wise to it.

The feedback I received when I refused pay money to be part of a cash for votes preferencing arrangement at the last election, was overwhelmingly in my favour.

In Victoria, several smaller parties have previously benefited from preference voting flows struck by professional 'vote whisperers' that were paid to negotiate the deals.



## Edinburgh Gardens booze ban voted down

Common sense has prevailed, with Yarra City Council listening to the community and voting against a proposed blanket ban on alcohol at Edinburgh Gardens. They recognised that it was a knee-jerk response to what is really a simple public policy issue. I had urged the councillors to oppose it, and to work together with the state government to make Edinburgh Gardens the best park in Melbourne.

The proposal was spurred on by complaints from some locals of overflowing rubbish, drug use and faeces in laneways beside the popular Fitzroy North park. The Council has now established a working group who will consider funding more bins, more toilets, and identify issues before they become unsolvable.



## Parliamentary Internship Program

My office has had the absolute pleasure of hosting Maddi and Ben, two participants in the Parliamentary Internship Program.

Through this program, they both wrote 6,000-word reports on policy issues we thought were worthy of investigation. Considering the issues that COVID-19 has

brought to the fore — both reports, while completed independently, are quite complimentary bodies of work.

Maddi's report, 'The New Normal: A Flexible Response to COVID-19 in Victoria, Australia' explores how flexibility can help Victoria's transition from COVID-19 and the benefits of establishing a new normal in how we work.

Ben's report, 'Loneliness: An Epidemic', dove into the prevalence of loneliness in Victoria, as well as the health outcomes and associated costs; and looked at evidence-based solutions that have been implemented in other jurisdictions. His report was also announced today by the President of the Upper House as the most outstanding report in this year's field.

I want to congratulate and thank Maddi and Ben for their tremendous work, which I know will prove to be useful resources for further research and exploration.

Both reports are available on my website: [fionapatten.com.au/reports/](https://fionapatten.com.au/reports/)



## Victorian State Budget

This was a great state budget and we got what we asked for. This included \$75 million for young people in foster care to remain in care until the age of 21, \$250 million for women, funding for drug treatment and rehab beds, \$5m for a second medically supervised injecting centre and \$13 million for libraries.

What I would like to see in next years budget is for the Government to measure well-being. We measure GDP but we don't measure if the economic activity is improving

our lives.

You can read or watch my speech on the budget appropriation Bill [here](#).



## **Demanding action against Jehovah's Witnesses**

In the last sitting week of Parliament, I called on the government to take every action available to sanction the Jehovah's witness church for refusing to sign up to the national redress scheme.

In addition to being one of the worst organisations named in the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse, with over 1,800 victims and over 1,000 perpetrators, they have taken extraordinary steps to protect their assets and discredit the findings of the Royal Commission.

In the days after I asked a question to the Attorney-General, the Commonwealth Government announced it would remove charitable status and deductible gift recipient status of their organisation.

You can read or watch my question [here](#).



## New court for drug diversion

In the last sitting week of Parliament, I supported the Justice Legislation Amendment (Drug Court and Other Matters) Bill 2020, which provides a framework for a Drug Court Division within the County Court of Victoria.

It will provide for around 120 people who are caught up in drug charges in regional areas to receive a diversion to drug treatment, instead of jail. It also establishes a County Court Drug Court pilot scheme.

In my speech I spoke about a prisoner at a women's correctional facility who told me her story of how different her life might have been if she had been sent to treatment instead of jail.

You can read or watch my speech [here](#).



## Donate to FoodBank

Make sure you consider donating money or food to FoodBank Victoria, so that they can continue to deliver essential food and pantry staples to the many families in need this Christmas.

Due to COVID there is an unprecedented demand for FoodBank to deliver essential food and pantry staples to the many families. Every \$1 you donate can provide 2 Christmas meals to someone in need.

Donate [here](#).

*My office will be closed from Monday 21 December and will reopen on Monday 11 January 2021. I want to wish you all a safe and enjoyable holiday and I look forward to seeing you in the 2021.*

**Fiona Patten MP**