



September 1st, 2020

Hi there,

As I write this, sirens and police helicopters compete for my ears' attention, while my eyes scan the grim daily Covid numbers. Many of us were on alert for earthquake aftershocks and the ongoing Delta strain pandemic outbreak. It's been a long, tough couple of weeks, Melbourne. We're counting down the days until the next easing of restrictions, as we struggle to minimise the harm of the pandemic. Bottom line, btw: get vaccinated.

Pandemic-specific legislation, which will replace the soon-to-be-expired state of emergency provisions, requires a careful balance between physical and mental health issues and economic and social costs. It is nuanced, complex and requires lawmakers to be well-informed and to openly eschew opportunism. As you'll see below, I'm working to stop politicians from causing harm when they cite mental health.

Here's an update on what I and my staff have been working on for the community.



Healthcare workers beg for sanity

Healthcare workers have slammed the selfish rioters. As the nurses said, they're protesting their right to overwhelm the health system.

I am appalled at the reports of nurses being spat on by protestors; many of my constituents are facing violence purely because they work to care for people.

In addition, the Shrine of Remembrance was used as a toilet, it is a low for political discourse in this country.

All politicians should condemn these acts. The flowery language of members of the Victorian Parliament has added to the heightened anger. Using phrases like 'apartheid' and 'Despot Militia' is completely beyond reason.

Healthcare workers have asked for a wage rise and all they've received is an angry man's spit.



Roadmap's hopeful route revs up vaccine race

I welcomed the dates and cautious approach to opening up by the Victorian Government.

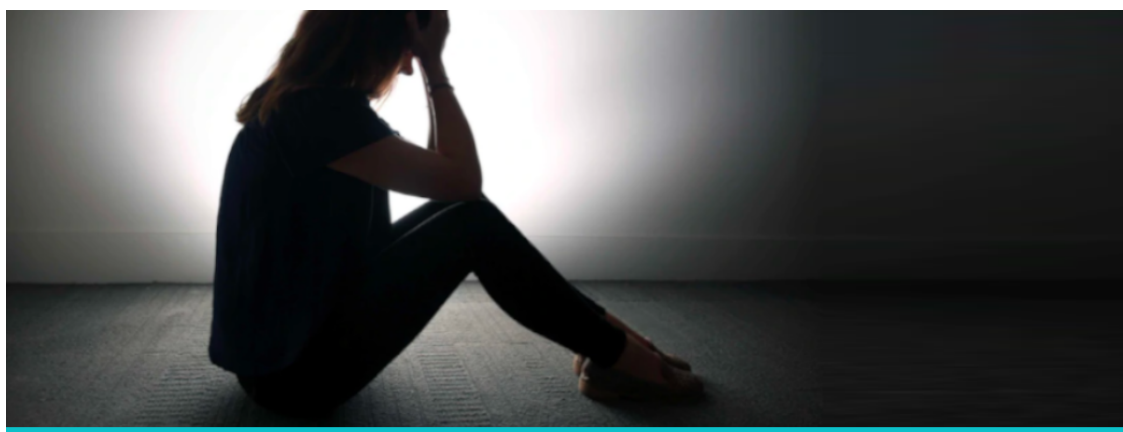
As beneficial as the dates are to our sense of time - I've booked my haircut for October 26 - the main takeaway for me was that we need to get vaccinated.

Even at 80%, many businesses will not be able to operate sustainably, particularly the live music scene.

Victoria must focus our minds on vaccinating as quickly as possible.

[In Parliament](#), I implored the Health Department to provide GPs in Hume City Council with everything they need to vaccinate their community.

We're not going to be able to model our way out, we need to vaccinate.



Workforce missing in mental health debate

Despite all the bluster, neither party of Government wanted to address the major issue facing our mental health system - the terrible wages and conditions that's causing burnout in the work force.

These nurses don't earn anywhere near enough for the physical and psychological stress that comes with their work. The Government must come to the table and give these workers what they deserve.

We know there's long been a dreadful failure in our mental health system. If the lack of skilled staff is not evident now, it never will be.

We need to pay them a lot more and now. As many as a third are thinking of leaving because of high stress and low pay. Think about that. What does that say about us?

Watch my speech on mental health [here](#).

And while we're on mental health...

MPs will soon be given expert guidance on how to talk responsibly about mental illness, under a Reason Party initiative to prevent harm to the vulnerable by those who would seek to politicise or misrepresent this complex issue.

I am pleased and grateful that the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the Legislative Council have enthusiastically embraced my suggestion Parliament provide such crucial information to those entrusted with the public interest.

The intention is to bring in a mental-health leader, former Australian of the Year, Pat McGorry, to conduct such a briefing, which could and should be recorded so that any members who might not be able to attend might still receive this vital information.

Mental health issues are being discussed publicly to an unprecedented extent because of growing concerns about the accumulating impact on people as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to cut its devastating swathe.

At such a challenging time for the entire community, being properly informed ahead of these discussions is a life-and-death responsibility, particularly for lawmakers and community leaders.

This heightened conversation is a good thing, in terms of reducing stigma and raising awareness of illness that will be experienced by half of us at some stage in our life.

There are more people experiencing depression in Australia on any given day than there are people suffering a cold. And there are twice that number managing clinical anxiety.

But it is a dangerous debate, too, because ill-informed or opportunistic statements can trigger and/or exacerbate mental ill-health, particularly in young people, sometimes to a fatal extent.



Mammon watch

We are looking into the Jehovah's Witnesses' overall situation on charity status and other tax exemptions. This appalling cult, which protects child-sex abusers,

signed up to the redress scheme at the last moment, under threat of losing its charity status. But the Royal Commission recommended other reforms these pariahs have ignored.

Summarising its view on JW, the commission's report said: *'The Royal Commission heard that 1,006 plausible complaints of child sexual abuse had been received by the JW's in Australia but no [alleged perpetrators](#) had been reported to the police. It appears that the JW's would have a substantial financial exposure if it joined the Scheme.*

Alternatively, the JW's may be stripped of its charity status if it fails to sign up by the 30 June 2020 deadline.

The JW's have refused to remove sex offenders from congregations unless the victim can produce a second witness. The organisation was criticised for its "Second Witness Rule" by the Royal Commission.'

Stay tuned for more on these extremists and on the broader issue of redress... It is ridiculous, and insulting to our predominantly liberal, non-sectarian society that profitable church-run businesses are subsidised by all taxpayers.



How good is hemp?

I and the Reason Party will be pushing hard for a policy that:

- Is environmentally unimpeachable;
- Is far more productive and efficient than timber for most uses;
- Consumes a fraction of the water needed by trees and cotton, two industries that stand to gain the most from adopting this policy;
- Can replace existing jobs in forestry and other industries;
- Can create many new jobs across a range of sectors;

- Provides Gippsland and other regions with a win-win transition to profitable industries that will enhance this beautiful region;
- Produce up to four harvests a year;
- Capture carbon efficiently;

The policy: industrial hemp production. Stay tuned on this one, too. The Reason Party believes the evidence is so strong that failing to at least properly trial this hugely promising industry would be negligent. Hemp is the sober cousin of cannabis – same family, totally different uses, though. Hemp is a sensationally valuable and under-utilised crop and part of our environmental solution.

Meanwhile, lockdown empathy to you all.

Fiona Patten MP