



4th of February, 2022

Hi there,

My thoughts are with you as the pandemic continues to ravage. It's a heavy time for so many, particularly our frontline workers and the vulnerable. The situation for aged-care residents and staff is dreadful.

In this crucial election year, I will be seeking your ongoing trust based on Reason Party's and my reform record. Evidence trumps rhetoric, pork-barrelling and hollow promises.

I'm going to try below to give you concrete, compelling reasons to believe that good, evidence-based public-interest change can come with reason. Yes, I would say that wouldn't I? But I'm going to show, not tell.

I welcomed the news the much-needed surge payment of up to \$300 a week for health care workers will be extended beyond February by the Victorian Government.

It is the least they deserve. But not all health care workers are eligible for the payment. Our nurses working in disability, aged care and mental health are ineligible for the payment. These workers are burning out too.

The support must be extended to these workers, otherwise more will resign, compounding the crisis in our health care system.

The Morrison Government needs to step up too and support a pay increase

across the straining healthcare system, as its very own Royal Commission a few years ago recommended.



ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPRENCY GO VIRAL

A The Victorian Opposition sought to block the pandemic-specific legislation I and other crossbenchers negotiated to replace State of Emergency powers with a law compelling accountability and transparency.

It is pleasing, if a little galling, they are now out there extolling the virtues of the increased accountability and transparency.

These are people who fuelled violent protests, including effigies and nooses, against the legislation.

They knowingly and recklessly helped incite death threats, rape threats, sniper threats, vandalism and abuse.

Recycled Opposition Leader Matthew Guy is being a little reckless, I believe, by ruling out any further lockdowns, no matter what turn the pandemic may take.

I said at the top I'd set out some reasons to be hopeful about our political system. Some evidence. Some proof of reform.

So, here're some positive things amid the insidious Covid darkness.



WELCOME HOME

When Parliament resumes next week, it will finalise debate on a bill I introduced two years ago to protect young people in out-of-home care - the statutory care of children and young people who are unable to live with their parents.

There are some 11,000 young Victorians in this situation. The new law will replace amend the current situation, in which all of these children must leave care by their 18th birthday.

That is around 800 young people in Victoria each year. It means most of them have had to fend for themselves.

About 85 percent of 18 to 21 year-olds live at home with one or both parents.

But kids in foster care, people who are vulnerable and may already have experienced significant trauma in their young lives, have to go it alone as their home funding ends on their 18th birthday. Imagine studying for your final exams and being kicked out of home?

Within a year of leaving care, half of these young people can end up homeless, in jail, or unemployed.

Stopping care at 18 gives kids in care a really tough start to adulthood, when

they should be worrying about to what to study, many are worrying about where to sleep.

This simple legislative change will not only change lives, it will also save \$1.84 for every \$1 spent. It means all kids in foster and kinship care can elect to stay at home until they are 21.



In the USA, this change halved homelessness, doubled education participation, doubled the odds of employment, saw a 54% reduction in arrests, a 38% reduction in youth pregnancies and saved around \$320 million dollars in the process.

Deloitte Access Economics have estimated that continuing care in Australia to 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds would also halve homelessness, reduce hospitalisation by one third, reduce mental illness by over 40 percent, increase engagement in education, significantly decrease arrests and massively decrease alcohol and drug dependence for this cohort.

That's a win, a big win, for them, their carers, and our entire community.



FAIR GO, FINALLY

Also coming up next week is finalisation of the law changes flowing from my legislative review and reform work aimed at extending occupational health and safety for sex workers.

It's a red letter day for the red light industry. The Government committed last August to implement my recommendation to decriminalise sex work as legitimate employment. This will protect these workers and reduce the stigma and discrimination they have for so long endured.

After pursuing this fair, decent and fundamental reform for years, I was appointed in 2019 by the Government to lead an inquiry into laws governing sex work in Victoria, and to find the best way of decriminalising sex work in Victoria. These changes flow from that report.

They include:

- removing offences and criminal penalties for consensual sex work;
- repealing public health offences;
- repealing the Sex Work Act 1994 to instead regulate sex work through existing government agencies and business regulation;
- modernising planning, public health and anti-discrimination laws to support a decriminalised system.

This is a case of making the world better by removing a discriminatory law, not imposing a new law. It simply extends to all sex workers the occupational health and safety, welfare and taxation coverage of any other employee.



F*#k FAST FASHION

Reason Party is launching a campaign to promote Victoria's magnificent fashion industry, an internationally recognised cultural and economic gem, and to highlight the appalling, unsustainable textile waste still occurring in Australia and globally.

F*#k Fast Fashion - Buy Local, Buy Ethical, Buy Less will run over coming months – with a range of special events around themes including: hemp; sexiness; sport; winter; knitwear; glam; gender neutrality; jeweller; First Nations/NAIDOC; body positivity; feminism; plus-sized.

We've got a lot to fix; 780,000 tonnes of waste is sent into landfill in Australia every year, making us the second highest consumers of textiles per person, after the United States of America.

I am thrilled to announce FFF is being officially launched next Wednesday with a panel discussion, stay tuned!

More people visit Victoria to shop than for any other reason, even sport. The industry currently employs tens of thousands of Victorians, and the vast majority of them are in small to medium size businesses.

FFF will also be engaging with organisations that recycle and resell fashion.



NOT ONLY THE LONELY

I have spent years seeking to alleviate loneliness, a silent killer as deadly as smoking tobacco or being obese. The Victorian Government has committed to implement key elements of my motion to elevate the problem – and facilitate the solutions – in part by allocating it a portfolio.

Meanwhile, I continue my regular sessions with the fabulous Chatty Café organisation, and comment it to you all. It's a lot of fun.



Fiona Patten MP  @FionaPattenMLC · Feb 2

It was wonderful attending the launch of [#ChattyCafe](#)'s new partnership with [@BaysideCouncil](#) and meet the volunteers who do amazing work helping people experiencing loneliness make new connections. Well done team and lets take over Melbourne one cuppa at a time! 🍵



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AND A FEW OTHER THINGS

Speaking of fun and fairness and community, I hope to see you here! 



Sign up to march with Reason at Pride March this Sunday!

[REGISTER TO MARCH](#)



THE FUTURE OF WORK

In case you missed my case for a four-day working week, this sums it up.

[Let's give the four-day working week a try in Victoria](https://theage.com.au) (theage.com.au)



WALKING AND CHEWING GUM

As I hope you can see, there's a hell of a lot going on. The focus needs to remain on the response to the pandemic. But it's also important to know that progress continues and that we can get the balance right if we put the public's interests to the fore. Always.

Cheers,

Fiona.