

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC ADVOCACY

**The Liberal Nationals have listened to Victorians affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Victorians need sensible and practical solutions to support them through the massive disruption caused by this event. This is what the Liberal Nationals have called for to help Victorians.**

## **STABILITY NEEDED WITHIN VICTORIAN HOSPITAL BOARDS (25 March 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called for the temporary extension of the appointments of hospital board members approaching the end of their terms to ensure board continuity and stability during the unfolding COVID-19 crisis.

A large number of hospital board member terms will expire on 30 June 2020. In some cases, board members' tenures will come to an end and in other cases, there is a limit of three terms a member can serve on a board.

The Liberal Nationals are calling on this date to be extended for all current board members by one year.

The Victorian Government must act quickly to temporarily extend these appointments during this crisis to provide stability to our stretched hospitals. Hospitals and health boards around Victoria cannot afford to lose leadership teams during this crisis.

## **ADVOCATING LAND TAX RELIEF TO SUPPORT TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS (25 March 2020)**

In March, the Liberal Nationals called on the Victorian Government to deliver land tax credits for residential and commercial property owners who do the right thing and provide rent relief to tenants affected by COVID-19.

Many businesses have been forced to close because of necessary decisions by the National Cabinet. Similarly, thousands of workers have lost their jobs and income across the state, and these households are now struggling to pay the rent on their residential tenancies.

Landlords should be encouraged to do the right thing by all of these tenants, commercial and residential, and provide rent relief.

Such rent relief would apply to those currently on the list of businesses forced to close by the National Cabinet in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, or those residential tenants who are without a job because of closures and undergoing financial hardship.

The land tax relief would be provided in the form of credits against a property owner's land tax bill and apply on a dollar credit for every dollar of rent relief provided.

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals, the Andrews Labor Government announced on 15 April 2020 that it would adopt the Liberal Nationals policy to provide land tax relief to landlords to provide tenants impacted by coronavirus with rent relief.

## **FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN MUST GET CLEAR WAY FORWARD IN COVID-19 CRISIS (25 March 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals sought urgent clarification from the Victorian Government to ensure that the agriculture sector was classified as an essential service.

The Federal Government confirmed agriculture is an essential service early on, but that it was up to the Victorian Government to deliver the detail of what this looks like. The lack of clarification from the Victorian Government spread confusion through the sector.

In this time of crisis, farmers and businesses in the food supply chain must have the confidence to continue their critical work putting food on Victorian tables.

The Victorian Government belatedly confirmed that the agriculture sector was an essential service on 1 April.

### **PARKS VICTORIA – FEE REFUNDS FOR CAMPING AND CARAVAN SITES (25 March 2020)**

The Victorian Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to proactively refund all Parks Victoria site bookings in Crown Land parks and National Parks until the restrictions on travel and social isolation are lifted.

While full refunds are being provided to people who had bookings at the Wilsons Promontory National Park, this refund policy should be extended to all Crown Land parks and National Parks in Victoria.

Whilst these booking fees may be small, a refund measure will go a long way to encourage Victorians to comply with the Government's directive to avoid non-essential travel, and assist the many Victorian families who are doing it tough and facing an uncertain future.

### **CHANGES NEEDED AROUND COUNCIL MEETING LAWS (27 March 2020)**

In March, the Liberal Nationals called on the Victorian Government to recall Parliament to provide legislation to enable Victorian councils to continue to meet and make decisions throughout the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, with the current legislation only allowing for local government meetings to take place electronically.

The New South Wales Parliament met in March and made emergency changes to a number of Acts of Parliament, including its Local Government Act, to enable councils to hold formal meetings remotely via electronic means.

The Victorian Government belatedly legislated to allow formal meetings to take place remotely via electronic means on 23 April.

### **DESALINATION PLANT KEEPING WATER BILLS UP WHEN VICTORIANS CAN LEAST AFFORD IT (27 March 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to reconsider its decision to order 125GL of water from the Wonthaggi desalination plant this year.

The decision to order 125GL of desalination plant water means Victorians will miss out on a reduction in water bills at a time when they need it most.

As we take extreme action to combat the spread of COVID-19, every dollar we can keep in Victorians' pocket will make a difference.

The Victorian Government should be doing everything it can to reduce the pressure on Victorian households.

### **INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS DURING COVID-19 (30 March 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to work with industry and union leaders to develop protocols to help prevent industrial disputation during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Reports are emerging that some Victorian businesses are being threatened with legal action by union officials during this crisis.

At a time when businesses are grappling with reducing staff in a volatile environment, businesses don't also need to face the prospect of industrial action at their workplace.

### **SUPPORTING VULNERABLE VICTORIANS BY SUPPORTING LOCAL RESTAURANTS AND CAFES (30 March 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to engage local food businesses to provide meals to vulnerable or isolated members of the community during the COVID-19 crisis.

With increasing restrictions of movement, especially for senior citizens, there will be a greater need for meals to be provided. It makes sense that those meals should be prepared by local cafes and restaurants wherever possible – supporting vulnerable Victorians and at the same time protecting local jobs.

The current COVID-19 pandemic is placing huge pressure on many Victorian restaurants and cafes that are struggling to survive. Restricting food operations to takeaway or delivery only has caused financial pain to many local businesses.

The \$500 million *Working for Victoria Fund* is designed to support businesses that may not benefit from other measures, such as payroll tax relief. Engaging local cafes and restaurants to meet the needs of vulnerable people in their own local communities will deliver a benefit to all.

### **LOCAL COUNCIL RATE RELIEF AND RATE FREEZE (1 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called for local councils to offer immediate rate relief to distressed households impacted by COVID-19.

The Victorian Government must also help councils with any loss of revenue so that the important role of councils can continue uninterrupted during this unprecedented time. Many smaller councils, as well as those in rural and growth areas, may not be able to afford the cost of rate relief.

Local councils have an integral and vital role in assisting their communities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through emergency management provision and the delivery of services throughout municipalities to those requiring assistance and support.

The Liberal Nationals have also called for consideration of a complete rate freeze by local councils for this financial year.

With many Victorians facing a period of employment instability, rate relief and a freeze on rates would help ease the financial burden and help to ensure they can stay in their own homes.

### **INTERVENTION NEEDED WITH UNION REFUSING TO UNLOAD CRITICAL EMERGENCY SUPPLIES (1 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to intervene after a union refused to unload critical emergency supplies including hand sanitisers and face masks on a Melbourne wharf.

The government must step in and ensure that access to critical supplies aren't further delayed because a union is trying to stamp its authority during this time of crisis.

### **PRIORITY TESTING FOR FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN BUSINESSES (1 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to deliver priority access to testing for the agriculture workforce, similar to the provisions made for health workers.

Our food supply chain businesses are prepared to do their part to comply with restrictions, but we can't afford to have their employees in a 14 day lockdown if it can be avoided.

Strict measures must be put in place to ensure our farmers and farm businesses are not exposed to unnecessary, lengthy shutdowns.

Farms and farm businesses must be able to quickly, and safely, resume operations as we continue to fight the spread of COVID-19.

### **HOTELS FOR HEALTH WORKERS (1 April 2020)**

In early April, the Liberal Nationals called on the Victorian Government to make Victoria's hotel rooms available for doctors, nurses and healthcare workers due to COVID-19.

Our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers are doing an amazing life-saving job all around Victoria, but they also have family and friends they want to protect.

The Liberal Nationals said that the Victorian Government should look at all options, including our vacant hotel rooms, to assist healthcare workers who are needing housing assistance.

Victoria's doctors, nurses and healthcare workers don't need the stress of having nowhere to go when providing frontline care during this crisis.

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals, Labor subsequently announced that it would adopt the Liberal Nationals policy to make hotel rooms available to healthcare workers on the front line of Victoria's coronavirus response.

### **EXPLANATION REQUIRED ON TOTAL RECREATIONAL FISHING BAN (2 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to urgently explain its decision to ban all recreational fishing under stage 3 restrictions, and to review the total ban to see if public safety can be protected with a more targeted restriction.

While exercise is a legitimate reason for people to leave their homes under stage 3, the Minister for Fishing and Boating declared yesterday that all recreational fishing was banned in Victoria.

This is inconsistent with New South Wales which confirmed that recreational fishing can continue, so long as social distancing and public gathering rules are observed, recognising fishing as a form of passive exercise.

### **FEE REDUCTION FOR TAXI AND PASSENGER VEHICLE OPERATORS (2 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to waive a number of fees tied to commercial passenger vehicle operators, including taxis, to assist with the economic fallout of COVID-19.

With the current restrictions in place and anticipated to remain for some months, taxi owners are yet another group of Victorians struggling with limited business and financial constraints.

At minimum the Victorian Government should suspend registration application and annual fees (\$55.10) as well as providing additional support to these sole operators and small businesses under the Victorian government's \$500 million Business Support Fund.

## **PAY FREEZE FOR MPs (1 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to freeze the salaries of all members of Victorian Parliament ahead of the scheduled pay rise for politicians on 1 July 2020.

The Independent Remuneration Tribunal made its decision on pay increase for politicians many months ago. What may have been appropriate 12-18 months ago is not appropriate today – the world has turned upside down since then.

Ordinary Victorians right across the state are feeling the pain of COVID-19, with workers losing their jobs, households losing their income, and small businesses falling over in the face of closures and restrictions.

There's probably no good time for an MP to get a pay rise. But there is a wrong time and that wrong time is now. Members of Parliament cannot possibly take a pay rise at a time when so many people are feeling financial pain.

## **TRANSPARENCY NEEDED ON COVID-19 RESPONSE (2 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called for a Joint House Committee of the Victorian Parliament to be established to ensure oversight on Victoria's response to COVID-19 while parliamentary sittings are on indefinite hold.

To save lives we will need to continue to take unprecedented action to combat the spread of COVID-19. But, like all government initiatives, these decisions should not be taken without scrutiny.

The Committee should allow for cross-party representation to ensure the Victorian Government remains accountable to the Parliament and the Victorian public.

Like the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), the Joint House Committee will have the power to question Ministers and request documents.

The Committee should use technology available to hold meetings and hearings remotely.

Establishing such a Joint House Committee must be on the agenda when the Victorian Parliament next sits to pass crucial legislation.

## **FREEZE ON CITYLINK TOLLS (3 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government and Transurban to cancel the increase in CityLink tolls set for April 1 to alleviate unnecessary cost burdens during the COVID-19 crisis.

Many of the people using our roads are essential workers. They're feeding us, they're health workers, they're delivering essential supplies, and so they shouldn't be slugged with extra tolls at this already difficult time.

This is already a terribly difficult time and Transurban shouldn't be making it even harder by increasing tolls.

## **TEMPORARY REDEPLOYMENT OF PROTECTIVE SERVICES OFFICERS (PSOs) (4 April 2020)**

The Victorian Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to enable the temporary redeployment of PSOs throughout Victoria in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since being introduced under the former Liberal Nationals Government, PSOs have made an outstanding contribution to the safety of Victorians and have proven themselves as a critical community safety asset.

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, a number of concerning incidents have occurred at supermarkets and shopping precincts whilst police prepare for spikes in offences such as burglary of commercial properties.

These changing community safety challenges come as reports indicate a 90 per cent fall in public transport usage – meaning more than 1400 PSOs are currently left protecting empty train stations while police resources are stretched across the state.

The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to temporarily expand the role of PSOs to a range of community settings. Given the essential role PSOs play in keeping commuters safe, this change must be implemented with a clear commitment from the Victorian Government to fully return all PSOs to Victoria's public transport network once the health crisis has passed.

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals, Labor announced on 6 April 2020 that it would adopt the Liberal Nationals policy to temporarily redeploy PSOs.

### **PAYROLL TAX EXEMPTION FOR JOBKEEPER PAYMENTS (5 April 2020)**

In early April, the Liberal Nationals called on the Victorian Government to exempt the Federal Government's \$1,500-a-fortnight JobKeeper payments from Victoria's payroll tax. The JobKeeper payment is designed to keep businesses connected to their workforce and to keep workers afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, under existing Victorian law, these payments will attract payroll tax. In some cases, where the businesses employ mainly juniors or those on lower wages, the JobKeeper payment will be higher than pre-existing wages. It is unfair that employers in that situation should now face a Victorian payroll tax bill for receiving Federal Government support.

One month later, on 5 May, Labor announced it would adopt this Liberal Nationals policy.

### **SCRAP BIN TAX INCREASE ON VICTORIAN HOUSEHOLDS (6 April 2020)**

In early April, the Liberal Nationals called on the Victorian Government to provide immediate relief to Victorian families by scrapping its Bin Tax increase.

On 1 July, the landfill levy is set to increase by 30 per cent. This means families will be paying more to dispose of household waste.

This tax increase is 17 times more than inflation. More financial stress is the last thing Victorian families need when faced with the extraordinary pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals, Labor subsequently announced on 22 April it would delay the increasing the bin tax until 1 January 2021.

### **GOVERNMENT MUST SUPPORT THREE-YEAR-OLD KINDER (7 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to fund Term 2 fees for kinder programs across Victoria to help ease the burden on both parents and kinders at this difficult time.

Many Victorian kinders are at financial risk due to the Victoria Government's lack of funding support for most 3-year-old kinder programs.

The only three-year-old kinder programs that are currently eligible for the Victorian Government's proposed support package are those in a small number of regional areas where state funded kindergarten has already been introduced.

### **GOVERNMENT MUST SUPPORT SCHOOL STUDENTS STUDYING REMOTELY (8 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to take full responsibility for ensuring that all students receive the technological support they need to learn remotely, including assistance that is additional to what has already been committed. As part of this, the government should look at innovative ways to partner with other organisations and provide additional funding so that teachers have access to high-quality resources to support remote learning.

While the government has declared it will support students with thousands of laptops, schools have been instructed to loan out their own devices. Where a school does not have enough devices to meet the needs of its students, they are obliged to find the money within their existing budgets. This makes times incredibly difficult for schools already grappling with uncertainty.

The Victorian Government must also make clear to parents what their responsibilities are with supporting the education system during this time of remote learning. Parents will have to take a more active role in supporting their child's education and the Government must facilitate this and offer more formal guidance.

### **HOLIDAY-MAKERS DESERVE REFUND OF EASTER CAMPSITE FEES (8 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to urgently refund campsite fees for the State's Crown land parks and National Parks to thousands of Victorians who have booked campsites for the Easter break.

Camping is off-limits on public land due to the Stage Three restrictions in place to help stop the spread of COVID-19. At a time when many Victorians are facing financial hardship it is only fair that campsite booking fees be promptly refunded by Parks Victoria.

### **WORKCOVER PREMIUM RELIEF NEEDED FOR DISTRESSED BUSINESSES (9 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to cancel its \$700 million dividend raid from WorkCover and to instead provide relief to distressed businesses.

With Victorian businesses in financial distress or going into hibernation due to COVID-19, the cost of WorkCover premiums is another pressure they could do without. Employers are required to bear the cost of workers' compensation insurance, even if normal business operations are disrupted or in hibernation.

WorkCover should be able to offer a discount or another form of premium relief to businesses that have been subject to closure or highly impacted by COVID-19.

### **RATES FREEZE TO EASE FINANCIAL BURDEN (9 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to place a freeze on farm rates to support farmers struggling with financial pressure caused by both the bushfires and the coronavirus pandemic.

In recent years, massive increases to farm rates in some Local Government Areas have pushed up farmers' rates burden by tens of thousands of dollars.

A freeze on farm rates this financial year would provide our producers certainty as they work to keep our supermarket shelves fully stocked. This rate relief measure is supported by the Victorian Farmers Federation.

This is in addition to the Liberal Nationals' call for all councils to consider a complete rate freeze this financial year to help all Victorians.

The Victorian Government must help councils with any loss of revenue so that the important role of councils can continue uninterrupted during these difficult times.

### **LIBERAL NATIONALS WELCOME ANNOUNCEMENT TO EXPAND COVID-19 TESTING CRITERIA (14 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have welcomed the Victorian Government's announcement to expand the testing criteria in Victoria for COVID-19 – something we have been calling on the Government to do for weeks.

The Liberal Nationals first raised the issue about the availability of Victorian testing kits and swabs in State Parliament, as Victorians who called the hotline and were told to get tested were being turned away when presenting to clinics.

Victoria's testing criteria since the outbreak began has remained too narrow, despite COVID-19 health experts urging governments around the world to "test, test, test".

We will never know the true number of Victorians that contracted COVID-19 since January, but the expansion of tests, something that weeks overdue, is welcome, to ensure no Victorian is refused testing again.

### **COMMON SENSE MUST PREVAIL DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN (14 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to ensure the extraordinary social distancing rules being asked of Victorians make sense and are being fairly applied so that everyone can play their role in keeping the community safe.

One of Victoria's most senior Police Officers has called out the inconsistent enforcement of lockdown laws in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Shane Patton has stated that the inconsistency and lack of discretion in the application of lockdown laws are undermining community confidence in Victoria Police and that he will now personally review every fine issued.

Deputy Commissioner Patton's warning comes as a number of Victorians have been unfairly fined or warned by Victoria Police for breaching isolation rules, including for jogging alone, paddle-boarding alone, taking a driving lesson with a parent, driving to a mountain bike location and posting twelve-month old holiday photos.

Victorians want to do the right thing during the COVID-19 outbreak, yet the inconsistent messaging and enforcement of social distancing rules have left the community confused and increasingly frustrated.

### **URGENT ACTION NEEDED FOR RENTAL STABILITY (14 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to announce a program that will provide clarity and assist both tenants and landlords during the extremely difficult time caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Victorian tenants and landlords have been left in limbo as the Victorian Government fails to address rental agreements for those affected by the economic fallout due to COVID-19.

The Prime Minister announced two weeks ago that the National Cabinet had agreed to a moratorium on evictions and that it was up to the states to put in place state-based packages and agreements.

Whilst the New South Wales Government has announced a package to assist tenants and landlords, Victorian tenants and landlords are waiting too long to see what, if anything, the Victorian Government will do.

### **CONFUSION REIGNS OVER TERM 2 (16 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to provide clarity and certainty in relation to children being permitted to attend school in Term 2.

The clear advice of the Australian Government and Australia's Chief Medical Officer is that children should attend school for Term 2. Despite this, a number of State schools turned students away following the Premier's insistence that students should be schooled at home.

On the first day of the second school term, the Chief Health Officer sent a series of tweets warning parents against sending children to school, noting "having around a million children and their parents in closer contact with each other, teachers and support staff has the potential to increase cases of coronavirus". By the end of the same day, the Chief Health Officer was forced to reassure parents that "Schools are not 'dangerous places' and parents should feel comfortable sending their kids to school...".

The enormous confusion caused by these contradictory positions is creating worry for too many Victorian parents and students. Working parents should not have to choose between keeping their job safe, or their children safe.

### **WAIVE REGISTRATION FEES FOR GROUNDED COMMERCIAL VEHICLES (17 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to waive registration payments for commercial vehicles grounded because of COVID-19 restrictions.

Trucks, especially those used to cart bulk commodities and some school busses are sitting idle earning no income – but their registration fees still need to be paid.

Registration for a prime mover for three months is \$3,157.80 and \$428.30 for each trailer.

With no income, these registration fees will be difficult for businesses to pay, especially if they have multiple trucks and trailers. If registration isn't paid, it lapses, meaning when there is work again, the owners would need to re-register and roadworthy their vehicles, which takes time and money.

The Victorian Government should waive these payments to ease the burden on small business.

### **RESPIRE FOR CARERS DURING COVID-19 (22 April 2020)**

More support needs to be provided to carers and families of those with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

During what is already a difficult time as Victorians self-isolate to stop the spread of COVID-19, with day care programs and other services closed, it's pushing families to breaking point as they have lost that critical break time that allowed them to recharge the batteries.

With all providers having to end group sessions, some have moved to establish more one-on-one sessions for those most in need of support, but it appears some providers are offering little or no support at all to those most in need after the cancellation of group sessions.

Respite is an essential service. It supports some of the most vulnerable people in our community. While every precaution must be taken, we need a consistent approach that allows carers and families to cope.

### **LONG SERVICE LEAVE FLEXIBILITY NEEDED (24 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to make long service leave more flexible during COVID-19.

While the Morrison Government's JobKeeper payments will save millions of jobs, many businesses need more flexibility with rostering and leave arrangements to stay afloat during these difficult times.

Currently, employers in Victoria have to give at least 12 weeks' written notice to employees before long service leave can be taken. The State Government should legislate to reduce this timeframe where employers and employees agree to it.

The NSW Government recently passed temporary changes that waive the notice period so that, by consent, employees can access their entitlements quicker. The FairWork Ombudsman is also encouraging employers and employees to come to mutually-beneficial arrangements that utilise an employee's paid leave entitlements, including long service leave.

### **TIME FOR VICTORIAN STUDENTS TO RETURN TO SCHOOL (26 April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to allow Victorian students to return to school, together with appropriate health safeguards.

Despite Australia's Chief Medical Officer and the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) supporting children learning at school in Term Two, most Victorian students are being denied that opportunity. This must change.

While schools, teachers and parents have valiantly adjusted to manage remote learning for students so far, this cannot continue indefinitely.

Too many parents are unable to properly supervise remote learning. Too many students are missing out on the full education they deserve. Too many families are feeling the pressure of having to simultaneously work and home school their children.

Expert medical advice is that schools are safe. So Victorian students should be at school unless parents want to keep them home or they are unwell.

The Liberal Nationals are calling for additional health safeguards to be put in place alongside a return to school. Staggered drop-offs and pick-ups, banning parents from school premises, banning contact sport and extra-curricular activities, increased funding for deep cleaning and medically-approved hand and surface sanitiser, as well as limiting adult congregation in spaces such as staff rooms are examples of measures that can further protect health and safety.

Teachers and support staff considered at heightened risk of COVID-19 due to age, health or other issues should continue to be able to work from home.

Despite Victoria's Chief Health Officer confirming that "schools are not dangerous places and parents should feel comfortable sending their kids to school", the Victorian Government maintains that students must not attend school if they are able to learn from home.

The Liberal Nationals believe that it is time for Victoria to move along with other states. This means that Victorian students should be allowed back to school, unless they are unwell, or their parents choose for them to learn from home.

### **JOBKEEPER PAYMENTS MUST NOT BE COUNTED FOR WORKCOVER PREMIUMS (28<sup>th</sup> April 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals want Victoria to follow South Australia's lead and exempt JobKeeper payments as remuneration when calculating WorkCover premiums.

To support South Australian businesses to maintain jobs and survive the COVID-19 crisis, ReturnToWorkSA has decided that wage subsidy payments under the JobKeeper program will not be considered remuneration when calculating premiums in 2020-21.

NSW is considering how JobKeeper payments will be treated for insurance premium calculations, but Victoria's WorkSafe is currently telling businesses that JobKeeper payments will be "included as remuneration for WorkCover premium calculation purposes".

Victoria already exempts allowances and payments for leave and termination when calculating WorkCover premiums, so JobKeeper payments should also be exempt.

The Victorian Government shouldn't be taking a cut of the money from the Federal Government that's designed to support workers and the businesses that employ them.

The Liberal Nationals are also calling on the Victorian Government to cancel its \$700 million dividend raid from WorkCover and to instead use these funds to provide relief to distressed businesses.

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals, Labor subsequently announced on 5 May it would adopt the Liberal Nationals policy so that JobKeeper would not count towards an employer's WorkCover premium calculation.

### **LABOR MUST RELEASE SECRET LIST OF SMALL BUSINESS WINNERS AND LOSERS (30<sup>th</sup> April 2020)**

Small businesses across Victoria were devastated by news the Andrews Labor Government was restricting access to its much-vaunted Business Support Fund, to businesses in only a limited number of industries.

Labor trumpeted the Fund as being available to help small businesses hit by the COVID-19 pandemic that cannot benefit from payroll tax concessions. Daniel Andrews held out the prospect of a \$10,000 grant to help struggling small businesses

Unsuccessful applicants were being told "*your ABN registration indicates that your industry classification does not meet the Business Support Fund's eligibility requirements*".

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals to widen eligibility beyond a few of Labor's favoured sectors, the Government backed down and agreed to expand eligibility to all industry sectors.

### **COVID-19 TESTING PUSH SHOULD TARGET HIGH RISK VICTORIANS (1<sup>ST</sup> MAY 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to reconsider its push for randomly testing 100,000 Victorians by targeting specific groups of vulnerable and high risk Victorians.

Daniel Andrews needs to re-consider his priorities of testing the likes of John Setka and his workmates to testing those who are at greatest risk.

Psychiatric facilities are a place of refuge and a safe place for patients suffering mental illness. For patients and staff to be tested would give peace of mind and an ability for the ongoing management and care to be conducted in a safe manner. Likewise those in aged care facilities or palliative care.

The loneliness for the very sick and elderly is causing undue distress to them and their families. For those in their final days or hours deserve the dignity of having loved ones around them.

Daniel Andrews needs to take the politics out and put compassion in and start using these resources in a way that will be meaningful to thousands of Victorians.

### **STATE GOVERNMENT MUST ACT TO ENSURE VULNERABLE VICTORIANS ARE NOT LEFT OUT IN THE COLD (1<sup>ST</sup> May 2020)**

News that over 1,000 vulnerable Victorians could face disconnection from their power supply should spark the state's Energy Minister into action.

A cold winter has arrived early in Victoria, and with people forced to stay at home due to restrictive COVID-19 directions, the last thing people need is to have their power cut off.

In a statement released exactly one month earlier, the Minister assured Victorians that their lights and heating would stay on "thanks to reforms put in place by the Victorian Government."

The Essential Services Commission Chair, Kate Symons, reported recently that more than 1,000 "newly-vulnerable" Victorians face disconnection. Victorians would rightly wonder, particularly with the government's assurances from 1 April, whether the Minister is taking this issue seriously.

Empty words won't help those who are stuck at home when the mercury drops and the lights go out.

### **INDEPENDENT INQUIRY NEEDED INTO VICTORIA'S LARGEST COVID-19 CLUSTER (6<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have demanded the Victorian Government launch an independent inquiry into how it has handled the state's largest COVID-19 cluster at Cedar Meats.

The Victorian Government failed to act for about three weeks after the first positive result, with workers not told and the Premier and Health Minister keeping the name of the business secret.

This organisation made a significant donation to the Labor Party just before the election that made Daniel Andrews Premier.

If the Government is to protect the safety of the community, Victorians deserve to understand exactly what happened to prevent this from happening again.

The Government refused to act when the first case was known and has sat back while this scandal continues to deepen.

### **VICTORIA POLICE CALLS OUT “GENUINE AMBIGUITY” ON COVID-19 RULES (9<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

Reports today that Victoria Police must seek supervisor approval before issuing a fine for COVID-19 social distancing breaches are yet another example of just how confusing Labor’s COVID-19 restrictions are.

With new easing measures being introduced earlier this week, Victoria Police has stated: “Victoria Police recognises there may be some genuine ambiguity from the community and police members alike regarding the interpretation of the new directions.”

As such, police have been instructed to apply a heightened level of discretion when enforcing social distancing rules whilst these new rules are being “understood by the community”.

Victorians want to do the right thing during COVID-19, but Daniel Andrews' new rules have left the community confused.

### **VIOLENT CRIMINALS ARE SET TO SCORE 14-DAY SENTENCE DISCOUNT (19<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

The Victorian Government has confirmed violent criminals are set to receive 14 days off their sentences for following the same COVID-19 measures being asked of the community.

The Corrections Commissioner has confirmed incoming prisoners are being placed in a 14 day isolation period following being placed into Corrections Victoria custody.

Under Victoria’s current Corrections Regulations, a prisoner who undergoes mandatory 14-day isolation or serves any other period of lockdown due to COVID-19 measures can apply for up to 8 weeks off their sentence, via “Emergency Management Days” – that is, days taken off an inmate’s sentence due to exceptional circumstances.

Furthermore, Victoria’s Corrections Commissioner confirmed the reduction would be automatically applied to inmates’ sentences during COVID-19, at a rate of one day off for every one day served in lockdown, and that at least 400 inmates would be eligible for sentence reductions to date.

The safety of the community must remain a priority during this period and some of Victoria’s worst offenders shouldn’t be awarded days off their sentence for following the same measures required of the rest of the community.

It’s disgraceful that individuals who have committed heinous crimes will be gifted 14 days off their jail terms just for following the same rules as everyone else.

COVID-19 isn’t a get-out-of-jail-free card and Daniel Andrews’ failure to rule out freebee days to inmates is placing the safety of the community at risk.

### **WORKSAFE KEPT IN THE DARK FOR 10 DAYS ABOUT CEDAR MEATS OUTBREAK (19<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

The Victorian Health Department took 10 days to notify WorkSafe that an inspector could have been exposed to COVID-19 at Cedar Meats.

Appearing before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee today, WorkSafe CEO, Colin Radford gave evidence that despite one of his workers attending the Cedar Meats site on April 23 to investigate an incident involving a worker who later tested positive to Coronavirus, he was not alerted about the outbreak until May 4.

The Victoria Government arrogantly refused to name the site of the Cedar Meats outbreak for far too long, potentially placing lives at risk.

The mass cluster of infections at Cedar Meats now stands at almost 100 cases and is Victoria's largest Coronavirus outbreak.

This failure by the State Government to name the location of the Cedar Meats outbreak and to advise WorkSafe of the potential exposure of one of its employees is too big a failure for Daniel Andrews to ignore.

There must be an independent investigation into the handling of the Cedar Meats outbreak – Victorians deserve to know the truth.

### **LABOR'S POLICE ASSISTANCE LINE FAILS COMMUNITY (19<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

Today in a Parliamentary hearing into COVID-19, a number of ongoing community safety issues resulting from the Victorian Government's botched rollout of the Police Assistance Line (PAL) have been exposed.

Established by the Victorian Government in July 2019, the PAL encourages Victorians to report breaches of COVID-19 restrictions and social isolation requirements.

Despite having been operational since July 2019 and having capacity for surge periods, Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton confirmed Victorians have faced average wait times of 17 to 20 minutes, with reports of up to 45 minute delays to lodge a report.

With the public having made over 30,000 reports of COVID-19 breaches via PAL, neither the Chief Commissioner nor Police Minister could answer how many of these reports had resulted in a spot check being conducted or a fine being issued.

It has also been highlighted that members of the public making a report via PAL have not been provided a reference number or receive follow up communication from PAL or Victoria Police – meaning community members are often left in the dark as to what actions were taken following their report.

These issues have followed reports of 150 staff at the call centre being laid off in August 2019 – with the Government unable to confirm if any of these former workers had been reengaged to help meet increased demand during COVID-19.

Victorians want to play their role in keeping the community safe during COVID-19, yet Labor's botched management of PAL has let down those who are simply trying to do the right thing.

Daniel Andrews' botched Police Assistance Line has left the community feeling confused, frustrated and letdown, and failure to reengage former staff during this period has worsened the police hotline performance and is a clear blow to regional jobs.

This understaffed and poorly managed hotline is yet another example of Labor failing to provide Victoria Police with the resources they need to do their job and keep the community safe.

### **VICTORIA POLICE LEFT SECOND-GUESSING DECISIONS AS FINES SOAR UNDER DANIEL ANDREWS COVID-19 RULES (19<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton has acknowledged the negative impact Daniel Andrews's ambiguous and inconsistent COVID-19 restrictions have had on community safety in today's Parliamentary hearing into COVID-19.

Chief Commissioner Ashton had admitted there "was a lack of clarity for a while" amongst Victoria Police over COVID-19 restrictions that had led to a number of fines being unfairly issued to Victorian individuals and businesses.

These comments echo concerns recently expressed by Deputy Commissioner Shane Patton – who stated the "inconsistent approach" when enforcing COVID-19 rules was "eroding public confidence in Victoria Police".

Despite the confusion caused by these rules amongst the community and Victoria Police themselves, 5,604 fines for COVID-19 breaches amounting to over \$8 million have been issued to date. Of these fines, 337 have been withdrawn or cancelled and a further 437 are being reviewed, with only 165 – or around 2 per cent of all fines – having been paid.

Daniel Andrews' failure to provide a clear set of rules during COVID-19 has left Victoria Police second guessing themselves and the community paying the price for Labor's ambiguous and inconsistent shutdown rules.

### **ANDREWS AND LABOR TO PUT MASSIVE PROJECT COST BLOWOUTS ON COVID CREDIT CARD (20<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

Under questioning at today's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearing into the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Transport Infrastructure Minister Jacinta Allan refused to rule out backfilling cost blowouts on Victorian major projects with Labor's COVID credit card.

Major projects like level crossing removals, the Metro Tunnel and the West Gate Tunnel have massively blown out in cost and Labor is now set to use the \$24.5 billion in borrowings to fix its budget mess, despite Labor insisting the funds would only be used to deal with COVID-19 and Parliament approving the borrowings on this basis.

When asked at PAEC whether the Victorian Government's \$24.5 billion loan will be used to pay for blowouts on the Metro and West Gate Tunnel projects, Jacinta Allan evasively and disingenuously replied:

*"The expenditure of those funds will be accounted for in accordance with the requirements set out in the Financial Management Act and I've got nothing further to add to those comments..."*

Daniel Andrews said the billions in additional borrowings was required to deal with the COVID crisis, but it's clearly going to Jacinta Allan's bottomless pit of project cost overruns.

### **PSOS ON PLATFORMS MUST NOT BE A CASUALTY OF COVID-19 (21<sup>st</sup> May 2020)**

Reports today that the Victorian Government is planning to expand the role of Protective Service Officers (PSOs) beyond the public transport network is a potential threat to the safety of commuters and the success of Victoria's PSO program in keeping train stations safe.

This proposal for a permanent expansion of the PSO role comes as 160 PSOs have been removed from the public transport network in response to COVID-19, leaving only 83 of Melbourne's 212 train stations currently patrolled by a PSO team each night.

PSOs have performed an outstanding job in supporting Victoria's policing response during COVID-19. However, any permanent expansion of the role of PSOs must be built upon, not detract from, the existing successful program throughout Victoria's public transport network.

A failure to promptly return PSOs to all of Melbourne's platforms will place the safety of the community at risk.

With further easing of restrictions likely over the coming weeks, Victorian commuters deserve a visible policing presence and Daniel Andrews must commit to returning two PSOs to all train stations as soon as possible.

If Daniel Andrews wants to expand the role of PSOs, he must employ more rather than removing them from train stations and compromise the safety of commuters.

With more Victorians than any other state not feeling safe on public transport at night, it is essential every redeployed PSO be returned to regular duties as soon as possible.

### **MORE JOBS GONE FOR VICTORIANS (21<sup>st</sup> May 2020)**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' labour force release shows 132,200 fewer Victorians were employed from March to April as the COVID-19 lockdown wreaked havoc on Victorian jobs.

More than 117,000 of Victorians losing employment were reported within greater Melbourne, with the Melbourne's South-East (down 25,300), North-East (down 22,600) and West (down 17,300) experiencing the largest share of these losses.

The labour force has shrunk in both greater Melbourne and country Victoria. Every region except a minor increase on the South West Coast has seen its labour force shrink.

Of particular concern, 6,100 people in the Latrobe Gippsland region left the workforce as the double whammy of COVID-19 and bushfires destroy its economy.

About 4,000 left the workforce in Shepparton and 5,800 did so in Ballarat. Melbourne is doing worse still with every part of Melbourne suffering job losses and overall experiencing more employment pain relative to the size of its workforce than the country areas.

Women and young people have been particularly hard hit. Across Victoria, 55 per cent of employment loss was borne by women. In Greater Melbourne, 52 per cent of employment loss were women, while in regional Victoria, 78 per cent of employment loss were women. That's a disturbing 11,700 jobs lost by women in regional Victoria out of the total 15,000 lost.

Today's data is more evidence that Daniel Andrews' extended lockdowns are hurting Victorians. The Victorian Government's strict lockdowns which have been the heaviest in the country, has exacerbated job losses across Victoria and must be reviewed immediately.

Day-after-day, the evidence mounts that Daniel Andrews' extended lockdowns are causing worse job losses in Victoria than elsewhere. Today's ABS data paints a particularly grim picture for women who have borne the brunt of the job losses.

Victorian households and businesses urgently need a government with a plan to address our economic emergency so we can get Victorians back to work rather than swelling the unemployment queue.

### **GROUNDHOG DAY WITH ANOTHER DANIEL ANDREWS COVID-19 FINE FAILURE (25 May 2020)**

Reports today that the Andrews Labor Government has botched the withdrawal of a COVID-19 fine is the latest failure of Labor's inconsistent and ambiguous COVID-19 restrictions.

On Sunday 5th April, 17-year-old VCE student Hunter Reynolds was issued a \$1,652 fine for breaching COVID-19 restrictions whilst undergoing a driving lesson with her mother.

Following this case being raised by the Opposition with the Andrews Labor Government, on the 7 April 2020, Police Minister Lisa Neville provided written advice stating:

*Victoria Police has however now conducted a review of this infringement to consider whether discretion should be applied following an assessment of all the circumstances. Victoria Police has confirmed that as a result of this review a decision has been made to withdraw the infringement.*

Despite this statement, last week Ms Reynolds received a penalty notice reminder in the mail from Fines Victoria. The notice was for the initial fine amount of \$1,652 in addition to a \$25.80 "penalty reminder notice fee" and a \$133.40 late fee if the fine is unpaid by 1 June 2020.

This botched fine withdrawal may only be the tip of the iceberg, with a recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Victoria's COVID-19 response revealing 337 fines issued by Victoria Police had been withdrawn or cancelled.

Victorians want to do the right thing during the COVID-19 outbreak, yet Daniel Andrews failure to set and enforce clear rules during COVID-19 has left Victorians confused.

The Victorian Government needs to clean up this mess and now recheck each of the 337 fines that it had committed to withdraw and reassure the public that this isn't the tip of the iceberg.

### **CELLAR DOORS SWEAT ON LONG WEEKEND (27 May 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to allow cellar doors to reopen ahead of the Queen's Birthday weekend to help wineries recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Cellar doors are a vital part of the regional tourism economy and the June long weekend is one of the most important weekends of the year for them.

Wineries which rely on cellar door sales have been told they must close as a result of restrictions which prevent businesses like pubs and clubs from selling alcohol without meals.

The summer's bushfires and a fall in restaurant sales means wineries are more reliant than ever on what sales they can make through their cellar doors.

The government needs to support the sector to safely get back in business by allowing them to reopen in time for the June long weekend.

Wineries with cellar doors should be permitted to open with the appropriate physical distancing requirements in place.

It's an odd decision for Daniel Andrews to say people can sit down for a cup of coffee, but they can't buy a glass of wine from a cellar door.

Following this call by the Liberal Nationals, Labor subsequently announced on 29 May that it would adopt the Liberal Nationals policy so that cellar doors would be able to offer free tastings to seated customers, and wineries with a restaurant or café would be able to sell alcohol by the bottle or glass and also sell wine tasting experiences if they are served with a seated meal.

### **URGENT ACTION NEEDED TO BRING BACK INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS (29<sup>th</sup> May 2020)**

The Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to urgently work with the Federal Government to facilitate safe entry for international students back into Victoria.

International education and training is Victoria's largest service-based export. In 2018, the sector generated \$11.8 billion in export revenue for the state and supported almost 79,000 Victorian jobs.

The impact of COVID-19 has hit the international education and training sector very hard in recent months, with international travel restrictions preventing many international students from arriving in Victoria to commence or return to their studies.

Our economy needs to get international students back to Victorian universities and training providers and that requires reopening borders to international students followed by 14 days of quarantine.

To aid the Federal Government in getting this done, the Victorian Liberal Nationals call on the State Government to help in subsidising affordable quarantine accommodation for international students on their arrival to Melbourne.

### **ANDREWS MISSING IN ACTION ON CBD PROTESTS (12 June 2020)**

Daniel Andrews' failure to stop a mass CBD protest and ensure fines were issued to participants was in clear contrast to actions taken in NSW and has left Victorians questioning if there is one set of rules for activists and another set for ordinary Victorians.

On 5 June, over 10,000 Victorians breached COVID-19 restrictions by attending a rally in the CBD and with at least one protester subsequently testing positive to COVID-19, the threat these gatherings pose to community safety couldn't be clearer.

Furthermore, despite the clear breach of COVID-19 restrictions by organisers and participants of this event, not one fine was issued to those involved.

Daniel Andrews has shown a complete lack of leadership and action by allowing these gatherings to occur and must now put the health and safety of Victorians first and act to shutdown these illegal events.

Whilst Victorian households and business have followed the rules at significant personal cost and Daniel Andrews' failure to act makes a mockery of those doing the right thing.

Victorians are asking why they're asked to follow these strict rules or pay a fine when Daniel Andrews continues to give a free pass to thousands of protesters?

On 5 June 2020 this Liberal Nationals called on the Victorian Government to use the State of Emergency powers and shut down the planned protest, following our call on 3 June 2020 for the Victorian Government to ensure that COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings are complied with and enforced consistently, including in relation to planned protest activities.

### **SNAIL-PACED START TO LICENCE TESTING RESUMPTION (16 June 2020)**

During Question Time in the Upper House today, the Andrews Labor Government finally revealed it will take around a year-and-a-half to clear the driver licence testing backlog.

Labor's Roads Minister, Jaala Pulford stated that the Andrews Labor Government is 'hoping' to have 700 tests done by the end of this week. With 55,000 cancelled practical drive tests to be rebooked and undertaken before new appointments open, many applicants will be waiting until the end of next year before being able to get their licence.

It is a staggering failure by the Andrews Labor Government to resolve an issue impacting on the lives of many young Victorians.

Daniel Andrews has wilfully ignored repeated ideas proposed by the Liberal Nationals that will make a real-world, instant impact on testing rates. When will this Government wake up and help our young people?

On 1 April 2020, the Liberal Nationals first called on the Victorian Government to prioritise those who have had their driving licence tests cancelled because of the COVID-19 crisis when testing recommences.

On 11 June the Victorian Government finally announced that licence testing will resume with new staff and temporary testings centres to open. However, the announcement to resume testing failed to provide any immediate relief to Victorians waiting patiently to get their licence, with no firm dates on when the testing backlog will be cleared.

### **RACING MINISTER ASLEEP AT THE REINS (16 June 2020)**

Victoria's racing industry still faces frustrating delays in getting patrons back on course, despite New South Wales achieving it weeks ago.

Racing Minister Martin Pakula announced today that owners will be allowed back on track from next week, but added "it will not actually commence until administrators and clubs agree on the protocols".

Without a clear plan from the Minister – or any notice to allow clubs to prepare – they won't be ready.

The Minister should have announced dates for a smooth transition weeks ago, but he's delayed until pressure from the racing industry and the Liberal Nationals forced him to rush out with this last minute announcement.

This failure means clubs are left scrambling to see what they can put in place and the strong likelihood remains they will not be on course on Monday. Again we will have owners on course at Randwick on Saturday while Flemington will be a ghost course.

Every day of delay is another day of lost income and increased pressure on the tens of thousands of racing jobs in Victoria.

Racing is one of the biggest industries in our state, contributing \$3.2 billion to the economy, has around 70,000 participants and supports more than 25,000 full-time equivalent jobs – many in regional Victoria.

The entire industry is under stress and coronavirus shutdowns have added more uncertainty.

The Victorian Government needs to urgently provide the detail of its plan to help the industry recover, not make announcements on the run that catch the industry by surprise.

The Shadow Minister for Racing previously raised this as an urgent issue for the government to address on 28 May 2020.

### **DISGRACEFUL ANDREWS BLAMES VICTORIAN FAMILIES FOR HIS COVID INCOMPETENCE (20 June 2020)**

In a new political low, Daniel Andrews has sought to blame Victorian families for his own incompetent mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under Daniel Andrews, Victoria is the COVID capital of the country. For Daniel Andrews to blame that on Victorian families – rather than his own incompetence – is an absolute disgrace.

Daniel Andrews encouraged 10,000 Victorians to protest two weeks ago by promising that they would not be fined for attending.

Now we see the consequences of Andrews' hypocrisy and double standards.

For Andrews to fail to mention the impact of his 10,000 people protest on the spike in COVID-19 cases demonstrates his culpability.

Victorians believed Daniel Andrews when he promised them his harsh lockdown restrictions would ease on Monday. Now Daniel Andrews has broken that promise and he has betrayed Victorians.

Labor's sudden backflip will cost jobs. It will kill small businesses that will never recover. It will mean that more Victorians will face unemployment. It will ruin many families' plans to safely gather at home.

Regional Victoria, where there is hardly any COVID-19 cases, is being unfairly punished by Labor's Melbourne-centric focus. There is again a strong case for an easing of restrictions in country Victoria that enables people to safely get back to work.

Victoria has laboured under the harshest lockdown laws in the country, but they've failed to protect Victorians' health.

Daniel Andrews has spent more time this week focussing on his corrupt Labor Government than on COVID-19.

Daniel Andrews is a hypocrite and has now misled Victorians over his COVID restrictions.

To blame Victorian families for his betrayal of them shows that Daniel Andrews is simply not fit to lead Victoria.

### **DANIEL ANDREWS' CITY-CENTRIC FOCUS COSTING COUNTRY JOBS (22 June 2020)**

Daniel Andrews' city-centric shutdowns are unfairly costing jobs in regional Victoria.

Victorian food service businesses had planned to reopen to 50 people on Monday under a planned easing of coronavirus restrictions.

The Victorian Government has blindsided country businesses with its last minute backflip.

Many regional towns have never recorded a single positive coronavirus case, but Daniel Andrews has dragged us back into lockdown because of outbreaks in Melbourne.

Local restaurants, cafes, hotels and bars have hired and rostered extra staff, stocked the fridges and worked hard to make sure they are compliant with Victoria's COVID-19 public health guidelines.

But Daniel Andrews is constantly shifting the goal posts and it's costing local jobs.

The Victorian Government now says it's considering a targeted lockdown of high risk suburbs in Melbourne, but this must go both ways by allowing businesses in low risk regional towns to safely move towards business as normal. Country Victorians are also frustrated by the continued enforcement of work from home restrictions until July 31.

Daniel Andrews's blanket ban on all Victorians going back to the workplace unfairly disadvantages regional communities, particularly those that have never recorded a positive case of COVID-19.

Daniel Andrews sent the message that it's okay to break the rules when he allowed 10,000 protestors to meet in Melbourne's CBD a few weeks ago – in direct breach of social distancing rules.

Daniel Andrews needs to explain why his mismanagement of coronavirus should cost country Victorians' jobs.

On 5 June 2020, the Liberal Nationals have called on the Victorian Government to allow people living in communities with no active COVID-19 cases to be allowed to return to work.

### **CORONAVIRUS TESTING CHAOS AS INFECTIONS SKYROCKET (23 June 2020)**

While the rest of Australia is successfully suppressing coronavirus infections, Victoria's infections have continued to rise, causing panic amongst Victorians and chaos at our testing centres.

Daniel Andrews keeps telling Victorians to get tested for the mildest of symptoms, but they can't.

Before testing centres were even open this morning, the expected wait time to be tested was unacceptably long at over two hours.

People are walking away from being tested because of these unreasonable wait times.

Not only are wait times too long, but Victorians have been left to decipher Labor's mixed messaging about where they can and can't go.

Victorians are trying to do the right thing but Labor's inconsistent messaging leaves too many Victorians guessing about what the actual rules are.

The chaos and dysfunction in Daniel Andrews' government has led to them dropping the ball on managing the pandemic.

We immediately need the testing centres Daniel Andrews has closed to re-open to ensure everyone who needs to be tested, can be tested.

By Daniel Andrews giving a nod a wink to the 10,000 protestors, he has caused outrage and confusion in the community; Victorians deserve better.

### **RESTART THE CREATIVE ECONOMY (25 June 2020)**

The Victorian Liberal Nationals have welcomed the announcement by the Prime Minister today to help restart the creative economy. This new \$250 million Federal Government package will help the entertainment, arts and screen sectors rebuild from the impacts of COVID-19.

The Victorian State Government's support for the creative industries is simply not enough.

In May the Victorian Liberal Nationals called for a \$50 million Creative Industries Restoration Fund, part of our plan to get Victorians Back to Work and Back in Business.

Our plan would provide active assistance and targeted support and have called on Labor to adopt it.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison said today the commercial arts and entertainment sector was one of the first sectors to be impacted by COVID-19 and will be one of the last to come out of hibernation as social distancing restrictions are eased.

The cultural and creative sector employed an estimated 289,000 Victorians in 2018-19. Department of Treasury and Finance modelling shows Victoria lost over 46,500 jobs in arts/recreation or 18 per cent from 14 March to 4 April. The impact on the creative industries sector-wide is a much larger number.

The Victorian Government has a responsibility to facilitate the recovery of this sector to pre-COVID-19 employment levels by June 2021.

The COVID-19 lockdown in Victoria has been harsher than anywhere else in Australia and Daniel Andrews' decision to not proceed opening pubs and clubs further will have the effect of damaging key sections of the arts and creative industries even more, underlining the need for further action by the Victorian Government.

### **DANIEL ANDREWS IS HIDING BEHIND TRAFFIC INSTEAD OF FRONTING ON COVID RESPONSE (29 June 2020)**

Today's announcement from the Victorian Government that it intends to increase car towing in local shopping strips, is a poor attempt to divert attention from its disastrous COVID bungle.

Instead of providing support to manage traffic congestion relating to immense queues for coronavirus testing, as Victoria recorded its fourth-highest day of new COVID infections, Andrews is instead planning to tow vehicles as they make the dash to their local shops for supplies.

It's clear that Daniel Andrews has no plan to deal with this COVID crisis, so he has started asking his team to divert attention elsewhere – today it's traffic management, what will it be tomorrow?

And what about businesses who are already struggling during the coronavirus pandemic? The Andrews Labor Government didn't consult with them before making these changes. Daniel Andrews shouldn't be focusing on fining motorists, he should be focusing on supporting small businesses and the Victorians who want to support them.

Further, the Andrews Labor Government has announced from next month it will recommence road occupation charges to charge developers for blocking precious lanes on arterial roads during building works.

This decision has come at completely the wrong time. The government should be doing everything within its power to assist local businesses and industries to keep unnecessary costs down and keep people in work.

### **FAMILIES FEEL POWER PAIN UNDER LABOR DURING COVID-19 (30 June 2020)**

Victorian energy bills continue to spiral out of control under the Andrews Labor Government.

The independent Australian Energy Market Commission estimates today, due to COVID-19, household power usage increased by 24 per cent between 1 April and 15 May.

Victorians face ever higher power prices under Daniel Andrews' failed energy policies.

According to the Essential Service Commission, average power bills have gone from as low as \$1,253 at 30 June 2015 (Victorian Energy Market Report 2018-19, p 50), to \$1517 at 31 March 2020 (Victorian Energy Market update: June 2020, p 10).

That is an annual electricity bill increase of up to \$264 or 21 per cent in under five years.

With these sky-rocketing power prices, it is no wonder Victoria has the highest number of customers in the country on hardship repayment plans with their energy company.

48,530 people currently are in need of such plans, with customers struggling with an average debt of \$1,378.

Daniel Andrews and Labor have failed to bring energy costs down and as a result, Victorians keep suffering.

In stark contrast, the Liberal Nationals want to take the pressure off power bills and help Victorian families.

That's why the Liberal Nationals have called for an increase to the energy concession for 2020-21 by \$1,000, to help hardworking Victorian families as part of our plan to get Victoria back to work and back in business. We understand every dollar counts and making a difference to Victorians where it matters, is what the Liberal Nationals are about. We call on Daniel Andrews to join us in supporting this policy.

### **DANIEL ANDREWS' INCOMPETENCE LETTING DOWN FAMILIES AND WORKERS (30 June 2020)**

A concerning number of childcare centres and schools are being forced to close due to positive coronavirus tests, as Victoria's second virus wave continues to spike.

The DHHS website lists 86 childcare centres that have 'closed for emergencies'. This is on top of the six schools and two childcare centres in Melbourne which have been closed as a result of a positive coronavirus test.

There are now fears of a possible return to remote learning. But no fear is as great as parents for the health and safety of their child, with many questioning whether Daniel Andrews is effectively managing outbreaks.

The Premier has mismanaged this pandemic from the beginning and has not curbed clusters which have continued to grow. The worst of Andrews' decisions was giving 10,000 protesters the green light to rally through the streets of Melbourne, giving Victorians the message that the worst of this pandemic was over. Now Victoria has the worst daily COVID-19 numbers in the country.

We want to know what Daniel Andrews will be doing to ensure that childcare centres are supported during this time and how the Andrews Labor Government plans to ensure that students are provided with the resources they need, so they don't miss out on vital learning during this difficult time. Children shouldn't have to suffer because of Daniel Andrews' mistakes.

Families and school communities have been disrupted enough. It's time for the Premier to get the back-up resources Victoria needs to effectively manage outbreaks so that schools can be confident that Term 3 will not see a return to children being forced to learn from home.

Daniel Andrews must foot the bill to support our childcare centres and schools for any financial losses they have incurred due to his failures in managing the coronavirus pandemic.

### **STATEMENT ON THE INQUIRY INTO HOTEL QUARANTINE (30 June 2020)**

The inquiry into Labor's scandal-ridden mandatory hotel quarantine program in Victoria is overdue.

From day one of the mandatory hotel quarantine program, Victorians have heard horror stories of lack of medical support, refusal by the government of specialised mental health services and exemptions, poor hotel conditions with bug infestations and allegations of inappropriate contact between security and quarantined guests.

These problems combined with 30 per cent of quarantined persons refusing a test and Daniel Andrews rejecting support from the Australian Defence Force for the management of the program shows how shambolic Victoria's program under Andrews has been.

In May, Andrews said the hotel quarantine program "has served us really well" and that the public health workers and program has been "critically important to slowing the spread and indeed stopping the spread of this virus and in turn saving lives."

The Chief Health Officer also said the benefit of "hotel quarantine is that we can oversight all of those individuals very closely."

Only now, as the situation has hit a crisis point, has the Andrews Labor Government finally admitted a failure of its own quarantine program has led to Victoria's coronavirus spike.

We trust the inquiry will investigate a number of problems and have access to key documents, which have been previously refused by the Andrews Labor Government under Freedom of Information.

The inquiry should also work alongside the current Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) hearings into the Victorian Governments response to COVID, and that all documents accessed into the scandal ridden quarantine program be made available for PAEC.

On 23 June the Liberal Nationals called for the support of the ADF to help Victoria avoid a second wave of Coronavirus.

### **ANDREWS DUMPING TAX CONCESSIONS FOR STRUGGLING BUSINESSES IN THEIR TIME OF NEED (1 July 2020)**

Daniel Andrews has today increased payroll tax for tens of thousands of Victorian businesses who are suffering during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The payroll tax concession for payrolls under \$3 million ended on 30 June and despite Victoria being the hardest hit by the virus, the Premier refuses to give businesses a break.

It's a horror move as 200,000 Victorians have already lost their jobs in the past two months. How many more workers will become unemployed after this devastating blow?

The Victorian Government will now take up to 4.85 per cent payroll tax from Victorian businesses. A business with a payroll of under \$3 million, could pay in excess of \$100,000 in payroll tax over the course of 2020-21. Many simply cannot afford it right now and the Premier's callous move could force them to shut up shop.

The Premier's decision to scrap these vital concessions also provides a disincentive for businesses to hire, meaning Victorians who've been laid off will suffer as well.

In May, the Liberal Nationals called on Daniel Andrews to raise the payroll tax threshold so that businesses don't pay this tax on the first \$10 million of payroll in the 2020-21 financial year. A Michael O'Brien-led Liberal Nationals government will ensure that businesses are supported, so that our economy can survive and thrive.

Businesses are the last thing on Daniel Andrews' mind. We have seen the results of Labor's mismanagement of this state in recent weeks. A spike in COVID-19 cases, now connected to a failure of hotel quarantine, has meant many Victorian businesses who were preparing to open, cannot do so. For businesses in the locked down areas, they are right back where they were in March and April, after starting to get back to some sort of normality.

It's clear that struggling businesses still desperately need relief from payroll tax. We call on Daniel Andrews to extend concessions immediately, so businesses can continue to operate and keep employing Victorians.

### **CONSUMER AFFAIRS VICTORIA – CONSUMERS LET DOWN DURING COVID-19 (2 July 2020)**

Victorian consumers have been let down during COVID-19 with the Andrews Labor Government failing to provide an adequate avenue for people to have their complaints handled.

The Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) website is the only option for consumers to have their complaints handled, and to be given advice on their responsibilities and rights in the consumer marketplace.

According to the website, Consumer Affairs Victoria provides advice and assists on topics including rentals and accommodation, estate agents and their responsibilities, building and construction issues, shopping and trading.

The arrogance of the Victorian Government can be seen in the wording on the CAV website:

*"We currently have limited services available. We will assess and respond to urgent matters as quickly as possible. Urgent residential tenancy and small business matters are priorities. If we consider your matter is not urgent, you will not receive a response."*

Since March 16, the phone lines at CAV have been inoperative even though the phone number is still listed and has been listed as a reduced service.

CAV was the responsibility of former Minister Marlene Kairouz until she resigned over Labor's branch stacking scandal last month.

The new Minister needs to urgently sort this mess out.