



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Public Interest Debate

4 May 2021

COVID-19 AND STATE ECONOMY

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (17:39):

The COVID crisis has shown us time and time again how vital our frontline workers have been in the recovery. The Wallsend electorate is home to two of the Hunter's largest hospitals, John Hunter Hospital and Calvary Mater Newcastle. I say a big thanks to all our wonderful doctors, our ambos, our nurses, our healthcare professionals, our security personnel, our admin workers, our cooks, our cleaners and our wardsmen, who have worked non-stop throughout the COVID crisis. I say to them, without you and your commitment we would not have done as well as we have.

I totally agree with the member for Keira and the member for Shellharbour that it is about the people, it is about the community. It is not about the Government. The Government says that it values our nurses and staff. I say to the Government, why not reward them by giving them the pay increase that they deserve? I thank all the workers at John Hunter Hospital and Calvary Mater Newcastle and statewide because they have put themselves on the front line every day, day in and day out, to care for patients, whether they had COVID or not. Those who put themselves on the front line care. They perform critically important work. We must acknowledge what they have done every single day.

Can you imagine how stressful it is for them just to put on and wear the protective equipment every day? Opposition members and Government members did

not have to do that. The workers did. And how are they rewarded? We are told that the Government is grateful to them but it does not want to give them a pay rise. The workers did it and they keep doing it every day because they are professionals and they care. I thank you on behalf of the Wallsend community and on behalf of the Opposition. We on this side say a big thankyou and we say to the Government that our workers and our staff deserve more.

In New South Wales there are about 100,000 nurses, midwives and healthcare workers. They have been on the front line of the COVID pandemic. They have provided care and support for our community. Of course, the police have also ensured community safety and community health, and we thank them as well. Instead of supporting these workers, the Government has announced it was cutting the pay of more than 400,000 public sector workers across the State, and that included 5,231 workers in the Wallsend electorate. It is a betrayal of nurses, police, teachers, ambos and healthcare workers, bus and train drivers, cleaners, security guards and so many others who have backed up day in and day out during the pandemic.

Our public sector workers have been the heroes—not this Government, not any government. It is our public sector workers who have been the heroes during this public health crisis. They deserve a medal. They do not deserve a pay cut. It is a deliberate act of disrespect to our hardworking professionals who kept our State going in the face of a once-in-a-century crisis. Because the Government cannot manage the New South Wales economy, it has propped up a bad budget by cutting the wages of public sector workers. Beyond being cruel and heartless to the workers, it is also a gross act of economic vandalism. Our local economy got slammed during the pandemic and was only made worse by the recession that came after.

Our local economy is still doing it tough. Not since the global financial crisis in 2008 has there been a better time to stimulate the economy by putting dollars in people's pockets so that they can keep spending. But what does this Government do instead? It hits the workers who have kept the pandemic at bay and who have kept showing up to work, or who have had to adapt to different standards of working conditions and kept doing that daily.

What I am asking the Government to do is to have pity on the workers, pay them what they deserve and not just say thank you to the workers, and not self-congratulate.

Please look at the vital job that these frontline workers have done and pay them what they deserve.