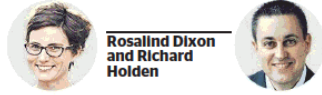


Close the Victorian border – now

To avoid the risk of a second peak of COVID-19 in NSW, the Premier needs to act urgently.



Rosalind Dixon and Richard Holden

It is time for NSW to close its border with Victoria – and stop all plane and car travel between the two states (except by those living in Albury-Wodonga). Not “wait and see”. Not “closely monitor developments”. But shut the border now – before more school holiday travel does irreversible damage to NSW’s chance of eliminating COVID-19 within the community.

In March, NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian faced what seems like a similar question. But the circumstances were in fact markedly different.

At the time, NSW and Victoria both had active and fast-growing COVID-19 outbreaks and the challenge was to encourage a strong and effective national response.

Together, Berejiklian and Victorian counterpart Daniel Andrews helped achieve just that: they worked together, across party and state lines, to encourage federal and state governments to do more, and faster, to combat the emerging public-health challenge. In this context, keeping the border between NSW and Victoria open was an important symbol of that unified cross-state effort.

And it had limited practical consequences. Other than for those in Albury-Wodonga, where a hard border closure would have meant cutting off 35,000 or so Wodonga residents from the nearest hospital, it did little to encourage movement across state lines.

At the time, no one in either NSW or

Victoria was allowed to leave their homes except to perform essential work, to exercise, go to the doctor, or to the supermarket. There was certainly little likelihood they would be going hundreds of kilometres away on holiday, or for a work trip to another state, without facing substantial fines and community disapproval.

We now confront a very different landscape. Cross-border co-operation and a truly national effort to combat the virus has been achieved. People are free to leave their homes and to engage in travel for leisure and work purposes.

And Victoria and NSW are facing very different public-health challenges. Victoria is grappling with a new peak in COVID infections that requires a return to strong and tough measures, at least in certain areas.

NSW, in contrast, has elimination – not just containment – of the virus within sight. This is the ultimate prize in the fight against COVID – a prize valued by health experts and economists alike.

Containment means the chances of contracting the virus are substantially reduced. It means those who contract the virus can count on a hospital bed being available. And it therefore means the chances that vulnerable members of the community will die from the virus are significantly decreased.

But it still means continued social distancing, sporadic work and school closures – and voluntary self-isolation for many older Australians and vulnerable members of the community.

And it means continued economic uncertainty and weak consumer and business confidence.

Elimination, by contrast, could allow everyone in our community to return to their normal routine with confidence –

and to reap both the social and economic benefits that come with that confidence.

Australia without international travel will be a very different place, and one that sees lower economic growth than an open Australia. But unless and until a vaccine is developed and widely deployed – something that is perhaps years not months away – the best chances of a return to economic prosperity lie in eliminating the virus within Australia.

And that is what NSW is close to achieving. We therefore cannot risk going back to a fight for containment – or the kind of fight our Victorian friends and allies are regrettably confronting. Relying on the good will of citizens not to travel does just that. It does not do enough to prevent the risk of a second peak in NSW.

To avoid the risk, NSW needs urgently to close its border with Victoria.

An intervention of this kind is not just good for public health – but also working parents, few of whom want to go back to working from home with our children being home-schooled.

Closing the border should be a temporary measure and constantly revisited. And it should be designed to allow those in Albury-Wodonga to be exempted for localised travel across the border. This would create a kind of Albury-Wodonga “green zone” that would prevent the otherwise significant disruption to that community, and be practically very difficult to enforce.

But it should be an urgent priority for the NSW government that, so far, has got almost everything right – other than cruise ships. Times have changed since March and it is time for the government to change with them.

Rosalind Dixon is a professor of law and director of the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law, and Richard Holden is a professor of economics at UNSW Sydney.

NSW has elimination – not just containment – of the virus within sight.

The law’s bullies can no longer be lionised

Jacqueline Haski



When news broke of Dyson Heydon’s alleged rampant sexual harassment, it became clear that even a former High Court judge could not dodge the juggernaut that is the #MeToo movement.

Ironically, in law – an industry where power and money are often regarded as more important than integrity – stories of unwanted sexual attention or the “innocent” hand on knee are all too common. Whether it be on the bench, at the bar, or in the solicitor’s office it is rife. Thankfully, it seems, enough is finally enough. These predators will have their just(ice) deserts.

But what about other forms of harassment? I’m talking about partners and others higher up the corporate ladder who blatantly harass (although often it is covert), torment, intimidate, micro-manage and belittle. Everybody knows about it, yet nothing is done to fix it. As long as these partners are making money, they are praised, even promoted. They become the untouchables.

So what’s a young lawyer to do? Confront the source? Chances are you’ll be managed out and gradually given less and less work until you are, literally, redundant.

Dare approach HR? A file note may be made, a meeting scheduled. But it’s career suicide. Tell the managing partner? You’ll be told the firm takes these issues seriously. And then you’ll suddenly find yourself working for a new partner, in a different team. You’re an experienced litigator. Well, congratulations, now you’re a property lawyer. And trust me, this “strategy” is akin to Russian roulette – your new boss may be just as bad, perhaps worse.

As one equity partner once told me, working in law is akin to *The Hunger Games*: kill or be killed. And he was one of the nice ones.

Law is full of alpha bullies, male and female. It is pervasive due to its inherent intellectual and adversarial nature. Recent headlines demonstrate the use of immense power for sexual kicks is, at long last, considered deplorable. The same must now be said about every other type of harassment and tacitly accepted bullying culture.

What will it take for management to no longer make excuses for very bad behaviour? No one, no matter how good their billings are, is irreplacable. Putting aside the cost of recruiting new staff, if a bad egg is left to rot, the stench permeates the whole firm. If there are no consequences, it’s just a matter of time until the cycle repeats.

Jacqueline Haski is a solicitor who has worked in mid- and top-tier firms for 16 years.

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HECS debt a barrier to equal parenting

When I was at university, I remember students campaigning against fees for degrees. No one was

warning about \$100,000 degrees back then – their beef was with the concept of any fees at all. Opponents warned the small fees we paid in the mid-1990s would inevitably increase. How right they were.

I graduated later the same year with a small HECS debt – about \$6000 for my entire degree, paid off long before I had children. As a new mother nine years ago, I naturally weighed up the financial equation of working and paying for childcare alongside other considerations, but HECS debt didn’t come into it.

Young women today aren’t so fortunate and the recent plan to increase university fees makes it worse. While high university fees hurt both young men and women, there will also be an economic effect in reducing women’s workforce participation when they have children. First, because the increase in fees disproportionately affects courses dominated by women. Second, because of the way families make budgeting decisions

Caitlin Fitzsimmons



about returning to work after parental leave.

The three areas that have proposed increased fees for domestic students are society and culture, creative arts, and management and commerce. The plan is for fees to go up the most for society and culture, a broad category that includes law, economics, politics, psychology, social work and traditional humanities subjects such as history.

The student contribution will rise from \$6804 a year to \$14,500 a year, with the government contributing just 4 per cent of the course cost. Department of Education figures show almost two out of three students enrolled in society and culture courses are women.

Creative arts includes performing arts, visual arts and design and communication and media studies. In 2017, about three out five students in these courses were women. Finally, management and commerce includes

accounting, finance and business degrees. This one is almost gender equal, with male students accounting for just over half of all students.

Of course, the cost of some degrees dominated by women is planned to go down. But the discounts on some degrees are not as steep as the increases on others. Curtin University analysis shows female students paying more will be slugged an extra \$5405 on average, while those paying less will save an average \$2404. Male students are less affected either way. It’s clear young women will bear the brunt of increased fees.

Some people argue it is a market signal to encourage young people to study degrees that are deemed more useful for society or, more accurately, for employers. That’s just silly. Students don’t look at the cost of an arts degree and decide to study information technology instead. The more likely outcome is people will either be deterred from university altogether or will do the degree they want and graduate with a huge debt. This will have a disastrous effect on the participation of women in the workforce down the track.

In 2020-2021, graduates will start paying back HECS when they earn \$46,620 a year, well under the median salary. Someone just over the threshold pays 1 per cent of income towards the HECS debt, while someone earning above \$136,740 forgoes out 10 per cent, on top of other taxes. For roughly every extra \$4000 in income, the graduate increases their compulsory HECS repayments by an additional 0.5 percentage points. It is a huge burden on take-home pay, providing an additional disincentive to return to work or increase days.

Women already face barriers to work when they have children, both financial and practical. Many families do the sums and decide that the cost of childcare means the lower income earner is effectively either paying to work or barely coming out ahead. A typical solution is for the secondary income earner to work part-time or not at all, ultimately harming their career and long-term financial security. In Australia, that’s usually the woman.

A huge HECS debt will only exacerbate matters.

Caitlin Fitzsimmons is a senior writer.