

CBDs will suffer if WFH gets political

OPINION

Paul Nicolaou



It's a great pity working from home — WFH — has become an issue in the undeclared federal election campaign.

The last thing businesses need is for attitudes to WFH to be entrenched in two opposing political camps. It's not a matter of politics for businesses. For many, it's a matter of survival.

Political warfare over WFH can only stymie progress in workers coming back to the office.

Premier Chris Minns has the right idea on WFH when he says public service staff should be in the office. But his efforts will be undercut if his federal colleagues campaign for WFH to be entrenched.

It's even more of a pity because progress was being made in reviving the CBD. Office occupancy rates were steadily climbing to 76 per cent of pre-pandemic levels,

and rising.

Supported by The Daily Telegraph, the NSW Government and the City of Sydney were in lock-step to make Sydney a 24-hour global city.

We were seeing signs of life in the night time economy with events such as the Sydney Comedy Festival and world-class theatre productions Hadestown and MJ the Musical doing well.

Taking the foot off the pedal on WFH is a setback for these efforts.

Despite the improvement, Monday and Friday are still weak and getting workers back to their offices would be welcomed by CBD businesses.

Many are down by 20 to 30 per cent on income compared to their pre-pandemic levels.

There was no need for WFH to become an election contest or an

industrial issue.

In the hothouse pre-election atmosphere, it is claimed WFH employees would be penalised nearly \$5000 a year if they return to the office.

But there is far greater value for employees to end the potentially harmful isolation, be with their teams and show what they can do.

And to be rewarded with career and financial advancement.

There is also the question of fairness. Are we really suggesting as a society that it's okay for essential workers — police, firefighters and health professionals — to cover the costs of turning up for work because they don't have the luxury of working from home?

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