



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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TRANSPLANTATION AND ANATOMY AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—IND) (8.37 p.m.): I agree with the member for Tablelands about the lack of enthusiasm of members in this Chamber about this Bill. I think the Bill in its virgin form is a good one and I can see no reason why it should not be passed.

Every so often we are confronted with a Bill that can make a heartfelt difference to humanity, a Bill that can provide the greatest gift known to man—the gift of life. This organ transplant Bill is one of those rare proposals that in no uncertain terms will save lives. When that chance is presented, there can be no excuse for delay, no valid argument why human life should play second fiddle to party political jealousies.

If somebody indicates on their driver's licence that they would be honoured to donate an organ in the event of an accident, what right do we have to take away that honour and choice? I believe that the next of kin, in the bleak haze of grief and mourning following an accident, do not have the rational thought processes required to sensibly override the desire of their loved one. If I tick the "yes" box on my licence application and indicate that I want to be a donor, I would be honoured to know that there was a chance that my choice could allow another to live and that, at the same time, a part of me might live on as well.

This Bill has been long overdue and we must all vote to make it effective. Every day lost can mean lost lives. Honourable members should think about this. Some 3,000 Australians are waiting for an organ donor—3,000 lives in limbo, plans on hold, lives dogged by a cloud of uncertainty and the cruel wait for a suitable donor. We now have a chance to tear down just one of the hurdles which can stand in the way of Queenslanders suffering the cruel bite of desperation. Australia has a well-won reputation of being at the forefront of medical research. We constantly impress the world with our medical achievements. However, unless these advances are utilised domestically at every available opportunity, we are letting down patients.

As I stated, Queensland has no set guidelines for the acquisition of organ donations. A simple tick on a driver's licence is not enough. We now have a chance, given the experience in South Australia, to double the number of organ donors per million of population when compared with the national average. I am not saying that we must follow the example of the South Australian Organ Donation Agency verbatim, but we must have some legislative framework in place to allow similar aspiring Queensland agencies to get off the ground. To a patient waiting for an organ, these agencies are like guardian angels watching over them and searching for the next miracle of medicine. We, the politicians, must give these angels the wings they need.

Our existing lack of legislation is at fault and it is a legislative void with blood on its hands. Enough is enough, let us right the wrongs and save lives. I have gone through this Bill with a fine toothcomb and can find no faults, no cracks which warrant a rejection. Queenslanders should treat with utter contempt any member who allows the parry and thrust of normal party life to interfere with the smooth passage of this Bill.

Honourable members should imagine their own adult child having just two months to live unless a suitable heart donor is found. The doctors tell them that the odds of such a match are not good, but there is always the chance, albeit a slim one, of striking a match. A suitable donor is then admitted to

accident and emergency and the doctors know that the patient will not pull through. The potential donor has indicated on their licence that they want to donate an organ—the chance for one last act of kindness which will inspire a lifetime of reverence towards that human being. Imagine how honourable members would feel if that final wish was robbed thanks to a bunch of bigoted party politicians who recklessly play chess games with people's lives.

Mr Lucas: Have you indicated "yes" on your licence?

Mr KNUTH: Yes, I have, actually. The member for Lytton has raised a good point, and I am quite happy and I am proud that he has ticked "yes" on his licence. As the willing donor's unused heart——

Mr Lucas: I am even willing to donate to you.

Mr KNUTH: Will the member? I am honoured that the member for Lytton would donate his organs to save my life. I think that that is the highest tribute that a man can achieve.

As the willing donor's unused heart dies in that emergency ward, so too dies any semblance of honour, respect and dignity associated with the party which opposes this Bill. Then, as an honourable member's own child dies through lack of an organ donor, they should be prepared to search their soul for eternity for the answer to why any Government could be so heartless and cruel. They will keep searching aimlessly because there is no answer to why this Bill should be blocked.

As the member for Thuringowa stated, Australia has the lowest rate of organ donations in the Western World, with patients remaining on waiting lists for up to five years. One in five will die before a donor organ becomes available. We are already lagging behind other First World countries on this issue, and I personally believe that it is an indictment on this Government and former Queensland Governments that such a Bill was not passed sooner. We have a moral obligation to every patient dying of an illness such as heart disease, leukaemia, kidney failure or lung disease to pass this Bill.

I believe that it is a shameful act to steal the laurels of praise from a member of Parliament who richly deserves the honour and the credit of this organ transplant Bill. To me, the Beattie Government has absolutely no reason to reject this Bill, except on sinister grounds. It has its own devious, scurrilous, immoral reasons to reintroduce the same Bill at a later date to glorify itself to the Queensland public and say, "Look how good we are. Look what we have produced for the benefit of Queensland." It will happen. I can see it coming. I place on record that I brought this up. It will happen down the track and I will be the first to go to the media and say, "Look what I said in Parliament months ago."

Should a bolt of selfish narrow-mindedness strike members of the Labor Government and this Bill fails to pass, rest assured I will bellow loud and strong to all concerned if an almost identical Bill is floated before this House in the future. I warn honourable members now that hypocrisy will be my catchcry, and God help the party at which my finger will point. To have lost lives due to political inaction or an oversight is one thing, but to lose lives due to petty political agendas would be a far greater slight on the wellbeing of Queenslanders.

I pray that the media is here tonight—is here right now—to take this in and prove to the people of Queensland once and for all the deceitfulness of the Beattie Government. This Bill should and must be passed, and it is Labor which has that power. The vote can prove Labor either has a heart and fosters an environment of voting on rational, compassionate, moral and ethical grounds or is heartless, insensitive, overbearing and downright selfish. A vote for this Bill is a vote for life. A vote against it is one that should dog the conscience of the person who cast that vote for eternity.
