



Speech by

PHIL REEVES

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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PROSTITUTION BILL

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (4.10 p.m.): I chose to speak on the Prostitution Bill so as to represent the views of my community in this place. I also wished to demonstrate that, contrary to what was being promoted by a few people, I am not voting for this just because I am a member of the Government. I am voting for and speaking to this Bill because I believe it is no good just to think that prostitution will go away. If we could stop prostitution by passing legislation here today, I and other honourable members would be the first to do so. Prostitution has been around for centuries. It is simply putting one's head in the sand to believe that we can cease its operation. The easy and more politically advantageous thing to do is just to ignore it.

I am proud to say that I am part of a Government that is willing to tackle the difficult and complex problems. We often hear complaint after complaint that politicians make decisions only for their political survival. The community's cynicism when it comes to politicians is at an all-time high. Today this legislation, more than any other, proves that the Beattie Labor Government is not just making easy decisions that are political winners. We are prepared to make tough decisions for the betterment of our community, even if that means that we have to take political flack for it.

As the honourable member for Mansfield—the supposed Bible Belt of Brisbane—I am acutely aware of how damaging this tough decision could be to my political survival. However, as an electors' representative, I am committed to being part of the tough decisions and I am not just looking for political gain. I have been contacted by 13 constituents regarding this issue, and I thank them for expressing their views to me. I particularly appreciated the meeting I had with Mr Alan Baker, the Vice President of the Australian Family Association, who also happens to be a constituent of Mansfield. Although I appreciate his views and I understand and fully support the aims of his association, I do not believe that ignoring the prostitution problem will solve anything in our society. Ignoring prostitution has proven ineffectual and it encourages the corruption problems of the seventies and eighties.

Among the concerns expressed by members of the community who contacted me was a concern about the message that this sends to our young people, particularly women, concerning the validity of this occupation, which has Government sanction. Another concern related to the question of how to prevent the introduction of further organised crime activities and drug usage in our area. Some people do not believe that this is a good decision for our community and the State. Concerns were also expressed about the effect of the legislation on families. Some believe that the move would serve to erode further the status of marriage and the family in our society. They believe that legalising our brothels only paves the way for the deterioration of a society that values safety and security and hopes to leave the nation intact for future generations. Some people felt that the legalisation of brothels would lead to increases in other areas of corruption. They also had concerns about it being exempt from the Freedom of Information Act and they had concerns about drugs. There was also a concern that brothels would be set up in our major shopping centres, and I will speak about that point later.

As I said, I can understand the concerns of these people, some of which I agree with and some of which I do not. But no-one could question their strong belief and commitment that this would lead to the breakdown of our society. I thank them for being so expressive and concerned about our community as to contact me and let me know their feelings and beliefs on the issue of legalised prostitution.

As I stated previously, I think it is vitally important that we as legislators ensure that we make the best decision for the whole of society. Prostitution will not go away, so we must ensure that we have the strictest and most effective prostitution regulations in Australia, if not the world. I believe the Minister has presented legislation that will ensure this. After exhaustive consultation, the Minister has picked the best aspects of the systems in other States and has come up with a model that allows for only small brothels to be established, while coming down heavily on street prostitution. These small brothels will be kept away from homes, places where children congregate and places of worship, and will not be allowed to be lit up in bright lights as they are in the ACT.

One of the most important features of this legislation is that it addresses the health and safety concerns that have been raised in the past about prostitution and also contains initiatives to encourage prostitutes to leave the industry. We as a Government have listened to the concerns of many of the religious groups and the Local Government Association and, as a consequence, have increased the distance of brothels from homes and places of worship from 100 metres to 200 metres. This legislation ensures that thorough investigations into licence applicants will be carried out to keep organised crime out of the sex industry. A licence will be restricted to one owner or group of owners and multi-ownership of brothels or franchising will be prohibited. Advertising restrictions will mean that owners are prevented from advertising for prostitutes and placing explicit advertising for services.

The Prostitution Licensing Authority will be established to investigate and approve licence applicants and will have the power to impose penalties and bring charges for licence breaches, with penalties of up to five years' imprisonment. This legislation will also take steps to avoid the current situation in Victoria, where brothels are regulated but strip shows and other sexually explicit adult entertainment has expanded in a largely unchecked manner. All sexually explicit adult entertainment will require a permit and will be conducted in accordance with the Liquor Act 1992.

As I said earlier, some people expressed a concern that brothels might be allowed to set up in shopping centres. Most shopping centres—and I cite Garden City, in my area, as an example—have areas where children play or are near child-care centres or movie complexes. Shopping centres are normally favourite meeting places for teenagers. Under the strict conditions proposed under this legislation, brothels cannot be established near areas where children congregate and, as a consequence, brothels will not be allowed to operate in or close to a shopping centre.

Although some in my community may use my support on this Bill for political advantage, I am very comfortable with expressing my views and my support for this Bill. That support is based on one main premise: avoiding the issue and hoping that it will go away has not achieved anything other than health and other societal problems. The only way that we could ensure that this does not occur is to regulate and control it and set strict guidelines and punishments for people who break the law.

The CJC will be required to conduct a full review of the legislation within three years of its commencement. If that review demonstrates some problems, I and most members on this side of the House will be the first to support changes. As I said earlier, as politicians, to make only decisions that are politically saleable is to ignore the greater responsibility that we have to the whole community. At the end of the day, if my support for this legislation is held against me and it has political consequences, so be it. My role is to represent the people within my area and to vote for and speak on legislation that I think will improve society in Queensland as a whole. I am very comfortable with that. Once again, I thank the constituents who raised their concerns with me. I commend the Bill to the House.
