



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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RETAIL SHOP LEASES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham—NPA) (4.35 p.m.): I am pleased to take part in the debate today. This is a simple but very important Bill. Over the years, many small businesspeople have come to me with problems that they have had with their shop lease arrangements. I see some definite improvements for small business resulting from the legislation. It is good to see that a bipartisan approach has been taken to the legislation and that it is receiving bipartisan support in the House.

One aspect that I would like to touch on relates to small business. The legislation will assist small businesspeople, whom we all represent. Every member of this House has in their electorate a small businessperson who is impacted upon by rental reviews conducted at less than 12 monthly intervals. Because of that, they look forward to the protection that is provided by the Bill. There are problems in regard to small business. We have to understand that small business is the engine room of growth and of jobs. That is more so in Queensland than in any other State.

Many small businesses have been unable to ride through the difficult times that we have seen over the last three, four, five and up to 10 years. A number of small businessmen in my area have found it increasingly difficult to survive, and there are a number of reasons for that. Ten years ago we talked about interest rates causing problems. Then we talked about the downturn in the business climate and the recession that we had to have, which was brought on by Paul Keating. Now we are going through this level playing field junk. As far as I am concerned, it is time that we moved away from the level playing field philosophy. It does not work. It is simply a recipe for disaster and it will bring down more small businesses. We will see more small businesses going bankrupt and closing down, and more people will have to walk away from their businesses because it is becoming too difficult to continue. Running a business has never been more difficult; that is the simple truth.

We must all fight for small business. I am certainly most concerned about the situation in which many small businesspeople find themselves. Small businessmen in Toowoomba, some of whom are second and third generation businesspeople, have been really struggling. Not too long ago, one of those people sold his house and was living above his shop. The business had gone downhill so far that he had run out of equity and refinanced by selling his home. I do not think that that is a particularly good omen for small business, but it is happening in Toowoomba. If one looks at the unemployment statistics for the last month or so, Toowoomba's unemployment statistics are not as bad as those from a lot of other places.

We all need to relate to the problems. We need to look at two areas in particular. The escalating cost of workers compensation is a very real problem for them. We have to address those problems. We have to look also at compulsory third-party insurance. Over the past couple of days I have gone on record as saying that I believe compulsory third-party insurance is out of control and that we will see further escalations in premiums. The recent \$40 rise in premiums will not solve the problem unless the other problem areas are addressed, namely, containing costs. If the Government wants to ensure that small business remains viable and that we have a sound small business sector employing more and more people—and this is the sector that employs people—the Government had better seriously start doing something about some of these other areas, otherwise more and more small businesses will go under. I support the Bill.
