



Speech by

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SOFT DRINKS (PROHIBITION FROM SELLING AT SCHOOLS) BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.24 pm): I rise to express my great support for the Soft Drinks (Prohibition from Selling at Schools) Bill. No matter how we look at it, childhood obesity is out of control in this country. While the threat of bird flu and the debate about funding for mental health in Australia dominate the public forum, an issue such as childhood obesity is creeping up on us at an ever-increasing pace.

My colleague the member for the Moggill made it clear when he introduced this bill on 12 May 2005 that soft drinks provide no nutritional advantage to our children. I congratulate the member for Moggill on his second reading speech, which has been widely recognised as well researched and thought provoking.

Why, then, should we allow soft drinks to be sold in school tuckshops across the state at an unsupervised rate to young Queenslanders? I know that I was shocked when my colleague the member for Moggill alluded to the spectre of heart attacks being a paediatric disease. As a dentist and as a parent with three children, I understand how hard it is to find a healthy balance between letting one's kids eat foods that they enjoy but are not particularly good for them and guiding them towards a diet that will help them grow and sustain a happy balance into the future.

It is important as the law makers of the state that we recognise the important role that we play in offering our kids and their parents the right choices in their school environment where they do not have the guidance of their parents in deciding what to eat and drink. We all know that, given the choice, especially as children, most of us would say, 'When I have the chance I will eat that whole packet of Tim Tams and drink a carton of coke.' When one becomes an adult one often says, 'I probably will not do that because I will make some more rational choices.' But as a child one says, 'I would love to be able to eat and drink as much of that as I like.' Given the choice and the money to spend at tuckshop, kids will say that they will have the coke if that is what is on offer as opposed to something healthier.

I am not in favour of some punitive system where children are forced to eat only fruit and vegetables and drink only water, but I stand up for the rights of parents to supervise and foster the eating and drinking habits of their children. I feel that every little bit of encouragement and assistance we can provide to these parents and young Queenslanders will assist.

The member for Yeerongpilly came up with a ludicrous suggestion that, in spite of the proposed legislation, parents could feed their children fried food and still leave them at risk of diseases. The fact of the matter is that every little bit of assistance that can be provided to encourage young Queenslanders and their parents to make what the member for Yeerongpilly describes as smart choices is valuable. Contrary to what the member for Yeerongpilly said, this bill is not about creating a list of taboo items but recognising that soft drinks do not have an essential or positive role to play in the daily choices being made by children and their parents.

This, coupled with a downright scary statistic that one in four of our children are now overweight, has led the Howard government in Canberra to act. If there is one thing that we can rely on about the Howard government it is that it will be a step in front of the States. The Howard government last year announced a \$116 million plan as part of the Building a Healthy, Active Australia program. This program identified the

problem of childhood obesity and sought to rectify it by providing grants to school parents and friends associations to promote healthy eating programs for young Australians.

The member for Hervey Bay read a thoughtful speech penned by the member Mount Ommaney. The member for Mount Ommaney argued that regular exercise was a great way to beat the great threat that is childhood obesity. I support the member for Mount Ommaney as I am sure she supports the Howard government's plan to strike back at the spiralling rate of childhood obesity by encouraging before- and after-school physical activity in Australian schools.

The fact of the matter is that teachers in Queensland schools provide great role models for our young Queenslanders. So why can our tuckshops then not play the part of the great dietary role model and leave behind sugary soft drinks? Starting good habits early goes a long way towards creating great habits for life. If this bill is successful, children will not be banned from drinking soft drinks altogether but they will be exposed to more healthy options in the nurturing grounds of their own schools.

While I am on the topic of the great things the Howard government is doing to encourage good dietary and exercise regimes in Australian schools, I can provide some advice for our own state government. I feel the Beattie government could take a leaf out of the Prime Minister's leadership book. I will provide a tip for the Premier right now: that would be to turn up to important divisions like the one we had this evening on the motion in the 5.30 debate. Some 43 other Labor members were good enough to put their names on the public record and vote in support of means testing public hospital patients, but not their leader. Some 43 other Labor members were prepared to split with their core constituency and tell them that they do not stand for accessibility to health care for all anymore, but not the Premier.

The weight of the research and evidence stands firmly behind this bill. There are simply no two ways about it. The government can either continue to shake its head in the face of black-and-white evidence and sit on its hands or join with those on this side of the House—the side of the House supported by the weight of evidence and research—while Queensland children continue to be unnecessarily exposed to sugary soft drinks in their school environments. The member for Moggill was right to say that we owe it to young Queenslanders to show some courage on this matter. We can make a change for the better for young Queenslanders with this bill. I call on the Beattie government to show some political courage. I commend this bill to the House.