



Speech by

Ronan Lee

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (7.58 pm): I am very pleased to rise in the House tonight and speak in support of this wonderful piece of legislation. Quite frankly, this legislation will save lives. It is immensely important to our state. One of the most saddening and, I think, tragic experiences in my time as a member of parliament occurred just prior to my first Christmas as an MP. I was coming home from an event and when my taxi turned into my street—which at that time was Strong Avenue in Graceville—I found that one of my neighbour's homes was well alight. Fortunately, no-one died in that fire, but I can imagine how traumatic it was for that family with young children who, three or four days away from Christmas Day, had their home destroyed totally by fire. It was just a really unfortunate event for them.

From memory, I recall that those people had had fire alarms fitted to their house, but unfortunately no-one was home when the fire took hold. I remember speaking to the owners of the property at the time. I actually found them sitting across the road on the veranda of their neighbour's home. Whether it was as a result of the shock or whether it was because of the surreal experience that was befalling them, they were just sitting there. They said, 'All we can do is sit here and have a glass of wine. It is all we can do. The house is gone.' It was in the hands of the fire at that stage. The fire was contained to just that property.

I remember feeling incredibly sad at what had befallen that family, but at the same time I felt a great sense of admiration for what I thought was the very sensible way in which they dealt with that experience. Their view was, quite simply, 'There is nothing we can do at this stage. None of the family are hurt. At least all that is gone is property and that can ultimately be replaced but loss of life simply cannot.' This piece of legislation will save lives. I am very pleased to be able to support it in the House tonight.

What concerns me, though, is the obsessive nature of some members in our community about security. They are worried that people are going to break into their homes, steal their property and take their money. But they are creating a much worse situation for themselves because they lock themselves in. On the one hand, they are doing everything they can to make sure their property is not stolen by thieves but, on the other hand, they are creating preconditions for their own doom in a sense. If a fire did take hold and they did not realise it—if an alarm failed or for some reason they could not hear it, and this is particularly so with our older citizens who when they go to bed at night remove their hearing aids—by the time they become aware that the house is ablaze, it takes them so long to actually get the doors open. When I was doorknocking the homes of elderly constituents during the recent state election campaign, I was absolutely amazed at the lengths some people go to to make sure that you cannot get into their homes.

Mr Lawlor: Sure it wasn't just you, Ronan?

Mr LEE: I am sure it is not just an experience unique to me. The point is that, when you knock on the door and they ask who it is and you say who it is, I can literally hear them opening three, four or five of those old-style latches. If someone is determined to break into your home, those latches are not going to make any difference ultimately. All they do is create a real problem when you need to leave in a hurry. I think that people, particularly our older citizens, need to be a lot more conscious of the reality of their own safety and security. Just because you feel safer and more secure does not mean that you actually are.

That was made very clear to some of my constituents when the minister attended my home safety seniors morning tea not so long ago. I want to thank the minister for that.

Mr Purcell: Great morning.

Mr LEE: It was a wonderful morning. We had a couple of hundred older folk at the Indooroopilly senior citizens hall. I want to thank our good friend who also attended—and the minister will smirk because he remembers that friend who, I understand, works for Queensland Fire and Rescue. Blazer Bear made an appearance. My senior citizens were delighted to see Blazer. It is often said that when it comes to spreading a very important message about fire safety the best person to do it is a bear. And what a great name for a bear—Blazer. I thank the minister for his attendance and I also thank Blazer for his assistance. It was very hot that day and I know that it was a significant experience for the person who assisted in Blazer's appearance on that day. It was a very hot day, and I am very grateful. The seniors who attended had a wonderful time. I am told that people learned lots of things—

Mr Purcell: They were wiser when they left.

Mr LEE: I think they were. I think they did learn the important message that just because you think you are more secure does not necessarily mean that you are and that there are some very simple things you can do to make sure that you are not just feeling secure but that you are genuinely safe and secure, whether it is from risk of property theft or from the risk of having a bad experience of a house fire.

I am delighted that some steps have been taken in this legislation to deal with the pain that can occur when alarms go off unnecessarily. I know that some of my residents at the Forest Place Retirement Village in Taringa have a great concern with one or two residents who have a unique experience when making toast. They have an ability to burn the toast almost every time they make it and that sets off the fire alarm. I am glad that some of the issues that are the cause of that have been addressed in this legislation.

I know that the member for Mount Coot-tha will join me in thanking the minister for the upgrade of the Taringa Fire Station. The station is in the member for Mount Coot-tha's electorate but is less than 10 metres away from my electorate and it does a great deal, if not most of its work, in my electorate. The station has been completely rebuilt, and it is now in great shape. It was in great shape when St Johns College at the University of Queensland was in need of assistance some time ago. I know that the hardworking staff at that fire station are thrilled with the new half a million dollars worth of Scania fire appliance that they are currently driving around in. I beep the horn every time I see them. It is a great fire appliance, and I know that people are very pleased to see it on the streets of Taringa. I am pleased with the resources the minister is putting into my community, and I am delighted with this legislation.

Mr Purcell: \$650,000.

Mr LEE: It is well worth it. I thank the minister.