



Speech by  
**Jarrod Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

Hansard Wednesday, 9 June 2010

---

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.23 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, at the outset may I congratulate you on your elevation to the panel of temporary speakers. This evening I rise to draw the attention of the House to a perfect example of how the Labor government has mismanaged the state's finances. What better way to celebrate that than by debating this bill in budget week? In fact, in the first paragraph of his second reading speech, the honourable Attorney-General said—

The bill before the House implements important reforms to further strengthen the performance of the Queensland government's workers compensation scheme.

It is not a matter of reforming the government's workers compensation scheme. It is another example of whatever this government touches it cannot get it right. Further, in his second reading speech the Attorney-General stated—

While WorkCover did not escape this crisis, its continued stable performance contrasted with that of other Australian workers compensation schemes that did not fare as well through the global financial crisis.

The Attorney-General then went on to compare Queensland with other states. The only comparison that should take place is between Queensland which lost its AAA credit rating in the GFC and all the other states which did not lose theirs. That is the comparison that the Attorney-General needs to make. This government never accepts responsibility for anything it does. No doubt the global financial crisis is behind the Premier's worst approval ratings in Queensland history of 69 per cent.

My contribution to the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 follows on from that of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and shadow Attorney-General. The course before the House is set to amend the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003, the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 and other relevant subordinate legislation to ensure a viable WorkCover scheme is in place for Queensland workers. The near collapse of the WorkCover scheme in Queensland is as a direct result of the changes implemented by Labor governments in this state.

In 1996 the Borbidge coalition government introduced the test to tighten injury claim provisions under the WorkCover legislation. Those provisions ensured that a rigid framework was applied to all WorkCover claims and that the scheme was a viable one to protect Queensland workers in the event that a workplace injury was sustained. Since the election of the Beattie government in 1998, the WorkCover scheme in Queensland has been weakened to a point where it has now run at a deficit of \$1.3 billion over the past two years.

The viability of WorkCover Queensland and its demise over the past two years is intrinsically linked with mismanagement by successive Labor governments in this state. I refer to an article titled 'Businesses call for WorkCover scrutiny', which was published in the *Courier-Mail* on 4 April and is available on the *Courier-Mail* website. I table a copy for those opposite.

*Tabled paper:* Copy of a *Courier-Mail* article, dated 4 April 2010, titled 'Businesses call for WorkCover scrutiny' [[2394](#)].

In relation to the WorkCover board, the article quotes the President of the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mr David Goodwin, as stating—

I think management needs to be investigated and they need to have a look at its internal protocols.

The article also states—

Mr Goodwin said the WorkCover board, along with union bosses Bill Ludwig and Ron Monaghan and Labor Holdings' Ian Brusasco, had to be held accountable.

The same article states—

Trilby Misso chief executive Graeme McFadyen said the public had been 'hoodwinked' and the picture being painted by the Government was a facade. He said sharemarket losses claimed by WorkCover of about \$800 million last financial year would have recovered since the economy turned around and would be nowhere near that level now.

The article quotes Mr McFadyen as saying—

I think the background of the economic crisis is very convenient for them to introduce changes.

That is a scathing indictment of the WorkCover board and this government's management of the scheme that is meant to protect Queensland workers.

One can understand why business in general is by no means a friend of this government. Since 1998 consecutive Labor governments have mismanaged WorkCover almost into insolvency. Now, to recover from the mess it has created, the Attorney-General introduces this legislation in an attempt to regenerate the scheme and increase the premiums. Who will pay for this? Businesses that employ working Queenslanders.

I have a great deal of empathy for Mr Terry White, deputy chairman of the WorkCover board. He serves on the board with the six Labor appointees and under the chairmanship of Mr Ian Brusasco, who, as I said, is also on the board of Labor Holdings. I am baffled that the Attorney-General maintains that WorkCover's dire financial position is as a result of the GFC. In his second reading speech, the honourable the Attorney-General championed Labor's record of 'protecting workers from injury in the workplace and for providing compensation for those who find themselves in an unfortunate situation'.

**Mr Ryan:** That's right.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** They are the words of the Attorney—and I note the honourable member for Morayfield is in agreement. Well, of course he is because it is his Attorney-General. But I point out to the honourable gentleman that the Attorney-General failed to mention the fact that policy implemented by Labor governments since 1998 has failed to maintain a viable WorkCover scheme. This legislation is required to rescue the current WorkCover scheme. Two million Queensland workers rely on the WorkCover scheme for injury compensation cover, and these workers deserve a scheme that is viable and well managed. Clearly this government has demonstrated its inability to do so, and this legislative rescue package is a last-ditch effort to save face before the workers of this state are again let down by this government.

We need a WorkCover scheme in this state that balances the protection of Queensland workers should a workplace injury occur with the premium costs associated and paid for by business. The cap that this bill includes is finally a protective measure that will ensure the viability of the WorkCover scheme is maintained into the future. The \$300,000 cap on claims ensures that the scheme is viable and that claims are at an appropriate level that recompenses workers if they are unable to work as a result of a workplace injury.

I note that the bill also introduces contributory negligence factors. That of course should be supported because, as the honourable shadow Attorney-General highlighted in his representations to the parliament, it is necessary in that if someone is continually advised of safe practices and they neglect to follow those safe practices then they are indeed contributors to negligence.

I say to the member for Yeerongpilly that we do not deny that the global financial crisis existed. He said that the LNP continually denies that the GFC existed. But what we do say—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Wendt): Order! The House will come to order. The member for Kawana has the call.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I note the objections raised. I remember at the time the comments made by the shadow Attorney-General in relation to a recession. His statement at the time was proved to be quite right. So statements made by us on this side of the House at that time in relation to the recession were in fact correct.

We do not deny that the GFC existed, but we do say that had the LNP been in power we would have retained our AAA credit rating. I yearn for the day of an LNP state government so that we are not continually dragged into this place to legislate against Labor Party stuff-ups—continual stuff-ups by the Labor Party. I yearn for the day that the LNP is in government, when we can come into this chamber looking to the future and not hear about review after review after review and continually review legislation because the Labor Party—it is a fact—cannot get it right the first time around. In summary, I wish to reiterate the points and support the statements made by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and shadow Attorney-General in relation to this bill before the House.