



Speech by

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SURROGACY BILL; FAMILY (SURROGACY) BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.50 pm): I rise to speak to the Family (Surrogacy) Bill 2009 and the Surrogacy Bill 2009. I want to congratulate the shadow Attorney-General and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Southern Downs, for his comprehensive presentation prior to lunch. This conscience debate is a solemn and important aspect of our Westminster tradition. For all its failings, our Westminster system of government has evolved to a stable and predictable point where the electorate can have broad confidence in the way their members will vote in parliament based on their party allegiances. But occasionally our system works best when each and every member of parliament is freed from the constraints of their party's whip and is able to exercise a vote guided by their own conscience and their own understanding of religious, ethical, moral and ideological obligations and principles. I am pleased that each side of politics has allowed its members to consider their own party's bill before the Legislative Assembly free of the constraints of their whip for that bill. This is our parliamentary tradition at its best. I also note the ruling of the Speaker with regard to the procedural issues that will cover the parliament's dealing with these bills.

I recognise from the outset the deeply moral nature of this issue and that members of this House, as well as members of the wider community, have views on this issue which stem from their own profound and considered understanding of life, the nature of life and the moral aspects of modern medical science. I appreciate that some members of this House, in searching their conscience and seeking to do right by their fellow citizens, may find that their faith leads them to the conclusion that surrogacy arrangements stretch their understanding of right and wrong to a point where they cannot in good conscience support the proposed legislation before the House. I respect these views.

I do not wish to speak at great length on these two bills, but I do want to briefly make known my reasons for opposing the government's bill and supporting the bill introduced by my deputy and the shadow Attorney-General, the member for Southern Downs. From the outset I want to thank the many people from all over Queensland who have called my office or who have written to me on this issue to express to me their heartfelt concerns for what the government's and the opposition's bills will do. I recognise that many of these people have contacted my office because aspects of this debate challenge their faith and their deeply and personally held views about what is meant by the nature of life and how it should come about.

I do not oppose the use of surrogacy as a method for couples to welcome into the world a child whom they can bring up in a loving and caring home. The surrogacy method of bringing a child into the world does not challenge my morality and conscience. What does concern me is the paramount importance that this parliament and the law should accord to the interests of a child in recognising a new technology for assisting with the bringing of a child into this world. The best interests of the child requires to my mind that, where possible, every child should have the love and care of both a mother and a father figure. My conscience requires me to oppose the introduction of the government's bill, which allows a child to be brought into the world into a family without a mother and father figure in their lives.

I do not come to this decision because of any prejudice or hatred towards same-sex couples. I come to my decision because, when it comes to welcoming a child into this world, the paramount concern is their

interests and their opportunity, where possible, for them to benefit in life from both a mother and a father. This, to my mind, outweighs all other concerns. I am concerned that the government's bill does not place the best interests of a child as the paramount concern and seems to be a step in the direction towards social engineering.

I am proud of my liberal heritage and I consider myself to be a liberally minded person. I strive to be a tolerant and compassionate person. At the heart of this issue I am concerned that the government's bill would take a significant step down the road towards turning children into commodities. I do not support the commoditisation of children. I note that on page 5 of the committee's report into the government's bill the committee, too, expressed a concern about the commoditisation of women and children. The arrival of a child into the world is a blessing and must never be allowed to be considered as a parent's or an adult's right—just a great blessing.

In seeking to do right by the child, we must never allow the legitimate and understandable desires and aspirations of potential parents to become the overriding consideration. The child's need for a father and a mother outweighs all other equitable concerns—no matter how unfair this might seem to what would be loving parents. We must in my view always place the child's interests first. Sometimes this will mean taking decisions and enacting laws that may, on the surface, seem unjust to many in our community. I accept that to some the opposition's bill will seem unfair, but I do not think we should allow our modern and liberal understanding of what constitutes a loving relationship to be paramount to the higher interests of the future child.

The parliament must always place the interests of children first and not adopt a double standard. In this respect, I am disappointed with the backflip that the Blich government has done in the past six months. When this parliament considered reforms to the state adoption laws in 2009, the Premier was happy to differentiate between same-sex couples and heterosexual couples in the adoption process. But now the Premier and her government seem to be determined to allow singles and same-sex couples access to surrogacy procedures. The government's inconsistency is striking and can only represent political ideology as a policy driver rather than good public policy. It is from my concern for the yet-to-be-born children of surrogate mothers that I feel conscience bound to oppose the government's bill and support the private member's bill of the member for Southern Downs.

Before I conclude, I want to refer to the Premier, who insists on making observations about people on this side of the House and their potential motives and the reasons we put our legislation forward. I want to say, as a proud Queenslander and on behalf of the thousands of Queenslanders whom I meet as I go around this state, that I am proud to have legislation in Queensland that may not be reflected in every other state of Australia, but that is what makes Queensland the best state. I am determined that I want to reflect the views of the Queensland community. I commend the opposition's bill to the House.