



Speech by


# Freya Ostapovitch

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

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## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (FAIR WORK ACT HARMONISATION) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mrs OSTAPOVITCH** (Stretton—LNP) (7.32 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Industrial Relations (Fair Work Act Harmonisation) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. I have had the good fortune to be a member of the Finance and Administration Committee to which this bill was referred and, therefore, was able to gain a great deal of insight into the bill by listening and reading the broad range of views from public submissions and hearings. As this chamber has heard from the Attorney-General and others, the object of the bill is to deliver on the commitments that the government made to the people of Queensland. The Newman government is determined to ensure that our state has a Public Service that it can afford and one that delivers for Queenslanders. One of the ways we intend to achieve this is by requiring the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to consider the state's financial position and fiscal strategy when it determines public sector wages. The bill also creates a new process whereby the Queensland government can brief the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission on the state's financial position, fiscal strategy and related matters.

In addition, the bill contains amendments to harmonise the state system with the federal system and the Fair Work Act. Those include the requirements relating to the taking of protected industrial action in connection with a proposed certified agreement and the changes to introduce a process for employers to request employees to approve a proposed certified agreement by voting for it. Those amendments also deliver further consistency with the federal laws by introducing a power for the Attorney-General to make a declaration terminating industrial action if the action is threatening the safety and welfare of the community or is threatening to damage the Queensland economy. Finally, the changes allow members of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to be appointed to conduct appeals of certain decisions that affect Public Service employees.

I would like to broaden the conversation in relation to Public Service employees and put into context some of the arguments put forward by the opposition. First, the Newman government is committed to providing a Public Service that operates efficiently and meets the needs of Queenslanders right across the state. That needs to be done within the tight financial constraints inherited from the previous government. Under the former government the state's finances were in such a precarious state that it was borrowing to pay Public Service wages. That is an outrage that can no longer be tolerated. Businesses in the corporate world would be berated for that kind of behaviour.

Under the former Beattie and Bligh governments, the Public Service grew to such an unmanageable and unsustainable extent that, at stages, there may have been more bureaucrats than doctors and nurses in Queensland Health and more paper pushers than teachers in Education Queensland. We are not, as the Labor Party may suggest, sacking people, but where non-essential vacant positions are identified then temporary contracts for those positions will not be renewed. That takes me to the second point, which was fundamental to my election. It is the harsh and sometimes unfair situation that is created by temporary contracts in place of full-time employment. This point has been a complaint of mine for years.

The previous government took the policy option to trend away from full-time employment and implement temporary contracts to give them flexibility and lower wage costs. Because of my voluntary work I know that those in social services have had to go from contract to contract, some of which are as short as three months. Members may ask how many people are affected by this trend. Figures show that Queensland Health has 14,850 workers employed on temporary contracts, Education Queensland has 13,774 temporary workers, there are 1,908 within the Department of Communities and 972 people within the Department of Transport and Main Roads. Those temporary contracts greatly impact employment security and stability. Allowing contracts to slowly replace full-time work was a betrayal by the unions of their members and a condemnation of the Labor government, whose members are the very ones who have the gall to sit there and continually interject about protecting employees.

Labor has abused what may have at one time been a reasonable term of employment. I think it has been used to avoid the reforms needed, so that bad employees could be dismissed without being subject to unfair dismissal. One of the areas where I have heard of the anguish firsthand is in the ranks of public school teachers. Public school teachers are at the heart and soul of the education system, which needs to prosper for our society to continue to grow. They serve our community by educating and preparing the next generation of leaders and workers, yet a number of our teachers fight consistently for job security. Public school teachers can spend up to three years living from contract to contract, with no security.

It is near impossible for people to get a loan for a house or settle within a community if they have no idea whether their contract will be renewed. It makes people live in great uncertainty. I cannot imagine a worse scenario for employment that the Labor government started. However, these are front-line core staff that we require in order to keep our education system alive. I have also been told that employees on contracts spend the last month of their time completing reports in order to apply for a new contract. I ask: who can live like that, never having any job security? That is Labor's legacy. Shame on them!

Lastly, I would like to refer to what the member for Mackay said last night. He appeared to mislead the House with Labor's scare tactics and lies. He said—

We have seen the axing of up to 40,000 public sector jobs across Queensland ...

Forty thousand? There are not even 40,000 contracts. How do we get from eight non renewables of contract in Toowoomba to 40,000?

**Mrs Miller:** Do you know how many public servants there are in Queensland?

**Mrs OSTAPOVITCH:** Yes. With that, I ask the House to support this bill.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Berry): Order! Members will cease interjecting.