




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

PARLIAMENT OF QUEENSLAND AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (Leader of the House) (12.52 pm): At the outset I would like to make certain that this bill, which will make a major change to legislation in Queensland, is not solely seen as the 'get Scott Driscoll, member for Redcliffe, bill'. This bill represents a change to current legislation that addresses behaviour that has been highlighted by the member for Redcliffe. I acknowledge that these changes represent the bipartisan recommendation of the CLA—it is comprised of equal numbers of opposition and government members—to make a change to the requirements.

In a normal year there are 42 days of parliamentary sitting. It is expected that a parliamentarian doing the job of representing their constituency should be here for those 42 days. That expectation applies to ministers, the Premier—everybody. Members of parliament have a responsibility and a duty to be in this House, debate and pass legislation, discuss matters of importance and ensure our constituencies are represented in the appropriate manner.

The current legislation gives leeway for a member to not turn up to parliament for 21 consecutive days. That allows for sickness and other legitimate reasons for absence. We are very appreciative of members who have had sickness who have returned to parliament. During my time in parliament there have been instances of former government members confronting serious depression. They had to be absent in order to deal with that. We were totally supportive of that absence.

I assure all members of this House that this legislation will never preclude the House giving appropriate consideration to people's disabilities at certain times and giving leave to those members. This House will make such a determination, and I am sure members from both sides of parliament will give appropriate leave where necessary. I am not sure about circumstances such as members taking world trips, mentioned earlier by the member for Nicklin, but certainly the House will, on legitimate grounds, always give the appropriate leave that is required.

The behaviour of the member for Redcliffe in turning up for an hour just before the expiration of 21 days—that is, in effect, a six-month period of sittings—treats this parliament with total contempt. Rightly, the Leader of the Opposition brought the matter forward to the CLA—a very appropriate move that was—and it was considered by the CLA. It was considered that this reduction in the amount of allowed absence, to 12 days, is reasonable. That is, in effect, a three-month period of absence without requiring the leave of the House. I want to make it very clear that the House can determine that a person requires more consecutive leave than that. There will not be an automatic exclusion from their representative duties; however, it will be a matter for the House to consider. That is exactly where this legislation will take us if—and I hope it is—it is passed here today.

The conduct of the member for Redcliffe has been the impetus for the reduction in the allowable absence. I do not believe the new provisions will change the behaviour of the member for Redcliffe. Given the legislation will allow 12 consecutive days of leave without approval, I am sure there will be an hour's attendance by the member for Redcliffe just before midnight on the 12th day

such that he will still meet the requirements. However, we are making it tougher for that sort of contempt of parliament, that sort of contempt for the people of Redcliffe, that sort of inappropriate behaviour, to occur. Quite clearly, it sends a loud message from Parliament House that we are not prepared to be treated in that fashion. The people of Redcliffe deserve better.