




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (RESTORING FAIRNESS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (8.03 pm): It is indeed a privilege to lead one of the state's great institutions, Queensland Health—an institution with a proud history of delivering quality health care whenever and wherever it is needed. I, like so many Queenslanders, grew up believing our public hospital system was among the best in the world. I and my family have strong personal and positive experiences of it. But throughout the term of the LNP government there was no medical treatment possible to cure the sickness in my stomach caused by our predecessors' treatment of our doctors, forcing them onto their Work Choices style individual contracts. We all know the lineage in industrial relations of those on the other side of the House. We will never forget the images of strikebreakers in balaclavas with Dobermans on chains being brought into this country to work on our docks.

Doctors probably did not realise that the LNP also aimed to crush their longstanding and successful employment conditions in pursuit of an ideological agenda. The LNP had been plotting against doctors for years. In February 2013 they released the *Blueprint for better healthcare in Queensland* which had nothing to do with patients and was instead a political manifesto.

In 2014, two Queensland Audit Office reports were released. These concerned private practice arrangements. But instead of using those reports to improve our public hospital system the then health minister and now opposition leader and then premier Campbell Newman used the reports to attack our hardworking doctors as rorters and frauds.

Much has been made of the arrogance of the Newman government. The community obviously expressed their view on this. Our side of the House was consistent in pointing it out. Now there is a bipartisan agreement on this, given the findings of the LNP election review. Regrettably the review only discusses that there was a perception of arrogance. Those on this side of the House know that it was not just a perception; it was a reality.

Who can forget the 1,000 doctors who gathered at the Pineapple Hotel to express their anger, disappointment and disgust at the actions of the now Leader of the Opposition when he was the minister for health? This is not a group of wild-eyed reactionaries. This is a group of highly responsible people not given lightly to protesting. But the actions of the LNP government drove them to this strong expression of opposition.

In January 2014 the then opposition leader and now Premier described the push to individual contracts as yet another example of the heavy-handed and arrogant approach of the Newman government. But it would get worse, much worse, for our doctors. They would watch, stunned, as the government they worked for, the government they served, continued to attack them. Legislation was changed in the middle of the night and without any consultation or any warning the LNP launched an all-out assault.

There is no greater arrogance imaginable than that which saw a minister tell our state's best and brightest clinicians, highly trained and world renowned among them, how to treat our neighbours who were sick and injured. Across the state our doctors were shocked at the heavy-handed approach taken to their employment. After years of service to the people of Queensland who had come to depend on them and their life-saving skills, their government had turned against them.

The Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation Queensland, in a submission to the state government last year, claimed that over 70 senior doctors had resigned outright from Queensland's public hospitals as a direct result of the introduction of the Newman government contracts. ASMOFQ claimed that some of those who had left were highly qualified and world class in their field. The response of the then premier, Campbell Newman, was to continue to attack the doctors and threaten that he would simply employ doctors from other states and overseas. But even this would have been difficult.

Groups such as the Australasian Society for Emergency Medicine, scarcely a radical body, warned its members against taking up positions in Queensland. A bulletin they issued in March last year read—

Employment warning for Queensland—in view of the increasingly intransigent position of Minister Springborg and the lack of progress in resolving critical issues, the Queensland health system, in particular its emergency services provided by dedicated emergency consultants and trainees, are threatened. It is clear that the majority of SMOs are re-considering their employment options.

ASEM reiterates our employment warning: we advise against taking up any position within Queensland Health at this stage. Nor in the future until the legislation has been rescinded.

Even from New Zealand, the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists warned its members against accepting a position in Queensland Health.

In the face of this opposition from both the medical and broader community, the Newman government tried to enlist the aid of their political allies—the then head of the AMAQ among them. Dr Christian Rowan, now the member for Moggill, had tried to win seats for the LNP in Gympie, the Sunshine Coast and even here in Brisbane but was spectacularly unsuccessful. As head of the AMAQ he faced the dilemma of who he should support—his members, doctors, men and women who had voted for him to represent their interests or his LNP political mates.

For the now member for Moggill, there was no choice. He sold out his members. As the head of the Queensland branch of the AMA, he came out in favour of individual contracts, which his LNP mates were pursuing, and in doing so sold out his medical colleagues to support what he knew then and he knows now was a system designed to deliver a political outcome that would in no way deliver for patients.

Dr ROWAN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I object to the statements put forward and ask him to withdraw. I take offence.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Minister, the member has taken personal offence.

Mr DICK: I withdraw. Clinicians could not believe that their efforts were being repaid with such disgust and they rallied, which they had never done before, in a desperate bid to fight back. They sidelined the now member for Moggill in a move which was unprecedented. But the now member for Moggill called in his debts to the political party that he supported ahead of his fellow doctors and own members when he sought to knock off another doctor, Dr Bruce Flegg, as the candidate for Moggill. The question has to be asked: what does the member for Moggill have against doctors? Patients lost and doctors lost but, if we are looking for a winner in the terrible, terrible tragedy of individual medical contracts, we need look no further than to the other side of the chamber and the member for Moggill.

A government member: You don't even hear the crickets, Cameron.

Mr DICK: I take the interjection. No-one on the opposite side are saying anything because they know it is true. In the meantime, our proud clinicians—who had held so many lives in the palms of their hands, who had delivered our children, cared for our kids—put their pride aside and begged the member for Southern Downs not to proceed. Until finally doctors said enough was enough, and almost 2,000 of them stood together at the Brisbane Convention Centre and said, 'Stop.' People like Dr Tony Sara were derided as interstate union thugs. People involved in ASMOFQ and Together Queensland stood with our doctors to support and protect them, and I recognise their outstanding service to fight against the LNP government.

Those unions, which had been demonised by those members opposite consistently this week without pause, stood up for people that mattered the most—the doctors who were under assault from the LNP government. Those doctors stood together and they forced Newman and the opposition leader back to the negotiating table. And it was here that Newman and the opposition leader played

their final card, knowing, as we all do, that there is one overriding principle for doctors. They always put patients first—and they would do so again at great personal and professional cost. Their employment conditions were stripped away. Their access to the Industrial Relations Commission and its protections was restricted. Their morale was devastated. And, for anyone who had any fight left in them, they were told that if they did not sign a contract they would not be able to treat Queenslanders under private practice. But they could not and they did not turn their backs on patients, nor did they turn their backs on Queenslanders.

While they worked on patients, their representatives in the trade union movement were continuing to fight—and I am proud to say that today that fight is over. We are going to restore the protections all government employees enjoy and rebuild the working relationship between those charged with managing the health system and those entrusted with the care of its patients, including senior doctors. No longer will doctors be distracted by the inherent unfairness of individual statutory contracts while they are working to deliver healthcare excellence to Queenslanders. Doctors work best when they can depend on each other, share their knowledge and expertise and look after one another when the pressure of their roles is high. They work best when they work as a team and work collectively. And now they will be employed under collective agreements again.

The Department of Health, along with hospital and health services, will draft new awards and negotiate for a new enterprise agreement with union representatives. We need a health network that provides real benefits for all Queenslanders based on the principles of fairness and equity for both our patients and our people. These people—including our senior and visiting medical officers—will be empowered through these new collective employment arrangements to work in partnership with local management. Then, and only then, Queenslanders will truly see the very best doctors working together to deliver the very best patient care in the country. Today doctors have won, but it is the patients of Queensland Health that are truly victorious.