




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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**RELATIONSHIPS (CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS) AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (3.21 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, I was actually taken aback by that great address by the Treasurer. I want to commend the Treasurer on his address. It was a very well thought out address to this parliament and very heartfelt as well—as the contributions to this debate have been. Before I make my contribution, I also want to commend the Attorney-General on bringing this significant piece of legislation to the parliament. She has done an outstanding job this year putting back into the legal space in our state principles of fairness, justice and equality during her tenure as the Attorney-General of this state. I want to commend her for this piece of legislation as well.

I rise this afternoon to speak in proud support of the Relationships (Civil Partnerships) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015. Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would know, the Australian Labor Party has a long and proud history of being the party that champions fairness and equality in Australia. Three years ago, same-sex couples in this state were stripped of their right to be officially acknowledged as partners and their union was reduced to being known simply as a registered relationship. They were stripped of their right to mark their partnership with a ceremony declaring their union before an official witness. This bill is about reinstating what should be a simple right to officially celebrate an important relationship. It is designed to remove a barrier of social exclusion.

In 2011 when I rose in this chamber to support the Civil Partnerships Bill, I reflected on the impact of several other laws introduced into this parliament by Labor governments in recent generations. Yesterday, we celebrated the 26th anniversary of the election of the Goss Labor government—the first Labor government elected in this state for at that time 32 years. It was the Goss Labor government that started down that pathway of enlightenment and implementing laws that would eliminate discrimination against same-sex attracted people in our community. That government introduced laws decriminalising homosexuality in Queensland—laws that were entrenched by the previous National Party government and that they would never consider removing. There were other laws introduced which were focused on removing discrimination.

I was very proud as the then attorney-general to introduce legislation into this House, the then surrogacy bill, which created a new regime for surrogacy.

Ms Grace interjected.

Ms Farmer interjected.

Mr DICK: I take the interjections of the member for Brisbane Central and the member for Bulimba. They were strong supporters of that legislation and served with me in the 53rd Parliament. At each of those stages, those legislative reforms were vehemently opposed—not just strongly opposed but vehemently opposed—by the then National Party and Liberal Party and then the Liberal National Party.

I believe we had that terrible stain in that debate on the surrogacy bill when the Leader of the Opposition moved amendments to ensure that same-sex couples and people in de facto relationships of less than two years could not participate in surrogacy arrangements. Then they pledged to change the act when they came into government. That was a pledge made by the member for Kawana when he was the shadow attorney-general. He was very strong about that before the 2012 election. He is a man who puts about that he has the courage of his convictions. He said that he would change the law. The only way he could have changed the law then to stop same-sex couples or de facto couples of under two years participating in surrogacy arrangements was to criminalise it. That was the only way he could have changed the law. Of course he did not have the courage of his convictions, and when he became the attorney-general he did not pursue that—after campaigning on that for a very long period of time.

As Minister for Health, I know the devastating impact that social exclusion and discrimination can have on the mental health of Queenslanders. For the LGBTIQ community, effects of exclusion and discrimination are all too real. The mental health of LGBTIQ people is amongst the poorest in our country, I am very sad to report to the parliament. According to beyondblue, their suicide rates are the highest. In fact, beyondblue states that the rate of suicide attempts for same-sex attracted Australians is up to 14 times higher than the general population. Furthermore, lesbian, gay and bisexual Australians are twice as likely to have a high or very high level of psychological distress as their heterosexual counterparts, making them particularly vulnerable to mental health problems. The elevated risk of mental ill health and suicidality among LGBTIQ people is not due to sexuality but is often due to discrimination and exclusion. That discrimination and exclusion was imposed on them in 2012 when they were stripped of their ability to celebrate civil partnerships in this state.

I am pleased that the Liberal National Party opposition is permitting a conscience vote on this. There was a time when the Liberal Party of Australia had at its core the capacity for all parliamentary members of their party, no matter what parliament they served in, to cast a conscience vote. The history of the Liberal Party was liberalism, but I know that is a foreign concept now. Not only have they turned their back on economic liberalism; they have turned their back on social liberalism, and of course they did not permit a conscience vote in the 53rd Parliament. In fact when our parliamentary party permitted a conscience vote they decried it; they criticised it. The member for Cleveland circulated something in his electorate saying that Anna Bligh would not permit a conscience vote when the complete opposite was the case. That is their history. It is very sad, although I give them credit now that they are allowing a conscience vote. Let us hope that remains the case for the 55th Parliament and beyond so these sorts of discriminatory laws can be removed.

Our society is making real progress towards breaking down barriers to afford LGBTIQ people the same rights as others, including a cultural shift supporting formalising their relationships. I know there are many people in Queensland who question this approach, but I think it is the right thing to break down those barriers of discrimination.

I respect the views of others, but this is the right step for our parliament to take to break down those barriers of discrimination. I gave a speech last week at the Kawana branch of the Australian Labor Party and I said, 'Our work as a party, as a trade union movement and as a Labor movement must always be underpinned by eternal values and principles like fairness, opportunity, equality and freedom.' People in our community have a right to live their lives free of discrimination so they can live happy, productive and fulfilling lives. Those values of fairness, opportunity, equality and freedom are the values which underpin this bill. That is why it has my full support. I commend it to the House.