




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.53 pm), in reply: Firstly, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. I am enormously proud to have carriage of this bill. I am proud to have the honour of being an industrial relations minister in a Labor government.

Today, the Palaszczuk government puts fairness back into Queensland's industrial relations system and starts to repair the damage done by three years of the disgraceful LNP government's changes to the working conditions of many government workers. The Industrial Relations (Restoring Fairness) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 gives effect to the government's election commitments and priorities for industrial relations reform. Our reforms will ensure that the hard-fought-for working rights of Queenslanders—lost virtually overnight, I might add, under the previous government—are returned.

This bill fulfils our election commitment to restore fairness for government workers by reinstating employment conditions for government workers that were lost as a result of the changes that were made to the Industrial Relations Act 1999 in 2012 and 2013. It re-establishes the independence of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission when determining wage cases. It returns the commission to its position as a layperson's tribunal, where employees and union advocates operate on a level playing field with employers. It restores the ability of industrial organisations and their representatives to freely organise and access members so as to enhance and protect their industrial interests.

We on this side are committed to a fair framework for government workers so that they can negotiate fair and mutually beneficial outcomes now and into the future. The LNP's framework stripped vital safeguards out of the industrial relations system. That is why this bill was so needed. This bill abolishes those aspects of the LNP's industrial relations system that, if allowed to continue, would have irreparably damaged the state's industrial relations system and undermined the government's commitment to restoring fairness for government workers.

The contributions to this debate from the LNP members indicate clearly that they have not learned a thing from the recent election. Queenslanders voted out the LNP because the LNP does not care about workers, it does not care about a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, it does not care about fair conditions and it does not care about job security. The LNP does not like unions, because they provide all of those things for workers.

We have heard from those opposite about why Queensland public servants should apparently fear us. Those opposite seem to have an obsession with telling public servants who to fear and who not to fear. It was not long ago that Campbell Newman said that public sector workers had nothing to fear from the LNP. If those opposite call sacking 24,000 government workers nothing, then I fear that the term 'fairness' would be beyond their comprehension. Every member of this House has 24,000 reasons to support the bill. Twenty-four thousand families who put their faith in the LNP have 24,000 reasons to support the need for a fair framework for our public sector industrial relations system.

There has been a sudden interest by those opposite in the privacy of public sector workers. We on this side of the House care about privacy. We protect workers' privacy just like we support workers in the workplace. To those opposite, who are still using their out-of-date lines on protecting public sector privacy that were prepared for them by the opposition's office, I urge them to read the Privacy Commissioner's responses from last week's public hearing. If the opposition members of the committee had hung around long enough, they would have heard the Privacy Commissioner confirm that all processes for commencing Queensland government employees are in accordance with privacy principles. All new starters in the Queensland government are protected by privacy laws. No private details are passed on. We know that and that is why we supported the Privacy Commissioner in her examination of the bill. Embarrassingly, when the LNP committee members did not get the answers that they were hoping for, they stormed out of the public hearing that they had called for.

If the LNP members want to talk about breaches of privacy, I can say that it was the LNP that shamefully legislated to allow workers' WorkCover history to be used against them in their future career prospects. Did the LNP consult the Privacy Commissioner when it allowed an employer to access these records? No, of course it did not. How many times did we hear the word 'privacy' when the LNP brought in its laws in the first place and did that damage? Was that a key reason the LNP brought in those laws? No, it was not.

What about the Leader of the Opposition revealing the private details of the member for Cook's children? Apparently, the privacy laws were de-necessary when the former minister for health contacted nurses by email—and no, not on their @Health.qld.gov.au email address; it was on their private home email addresses—to tell them about unilateral changes to their work conditions. What was his response when these nurses sent him a letter telling him their concerns about privacy? Nothing. The former minister for health and now opposition leader—fourth time's a charm—he did not have the decency to respond to their concerns and he still has not. That is how much the LNP respects privacy. Under the LNP, when it comes to privacy, there is no sacred ground. When it comes to privacy, the shirtless ironing, global financial crisis denying, de-necessary muckraker for Maranoa cannot claim the high moral ground. But at least he got his man into Moggill finally.

Unlike the arrogant LNP, which basically did not consult with anyone before ramming its unfair industrial relations changes through, the Palaszczuk government has consulted broadly, even within short time frames. We are not making these changes in the dead of night and we are making no apologies for working quickly—

Mr Rickuss: What's the time? It's 11 o'clock.

Mr PITT: The member for Lockyer should not worry. I will get to him. We make no apologies for working quickly to deliver on our election commitment to restore fairness to Queensland state and local government workers. If it is past the bedtime of the member for Lockyer he can go to sleep. The rest of us are here working to restore fairness to Queensland workers. We are delivering on our election commitment. We are delivering on what was promised. It must be such a foreign concept for those opposite to actually deliver on an election promise. Those opposite let down so many people. These changes are needed quickly because allowing the LNP's unfair laws to go unabated will cause damage to the state's IR system.

The Labor government and the relevant departments consulted with the peak body for local councils comprehensively on all aspects of the bill. It has been custom and practice to consult with the LGAQ as the representative body rather than individual councils. We have given everyone who wanted an opportunity to make a submission to the committee on the bill an opportunity to do so, including individual councils. As I mentioned last week, the LNP demanded a public hearing with the Privacy Commissioner. Of course the Palaszczuk government agreed to it as part of our priority on transparency in the wake of Campbell Newman's reign. Did the LNP consult with the Privacy Commissioner when it introduced its unnecessary and unfair changes to the act? No, it did not. It did not care about consultation. Did it consult with each and every council when it brought in its ideological laws? No, it did not. Imagine if I had introduced this bill on Tuesday, gave the committee one day to consider it and then debated the bill on the Thursday of the same week. That is exactly what those opposite did with the workers' compensation legislation changes in 2013. That became the pattern of behaviour in this place. And those opposite have the gall to talk about shortened time frames on reporting and what we do in committees!

I heard the member for Caloundra saying that the members of the former Labor government should hang their heads in shame. I do not know what he was talking about. If anyone should be hanging their heads in shame it is those opposite for the way they treated this place like a plaything. Some local councils have made comments in the media today, as have some LNP members, that these changes will result in job losses. There is no excuse for councils to use this act, which restores fairness to local government workers, as a cover to sack employees. I refer to comments made in the

Cairns Post on 17 May 2015 where the Cairns Regional Council mayor stated that job losses in the Douglas shire would not be happening. Interestingly, she said she did not believe the act would have any impact on jobs in her council and if anything they may be increasing their employment by a small amount. Fewer than eight of Queensland's 77 councils have made agreements using the Newman government award. Under Mr Newman's award modernisation process employees in these councils were prevented from bargaining for some of the most important workplace conditions, such as job security and the right to be consulted. By passing these laws tonight, this parliament will give local governments in Queensland certainty and the opportunity to either rollover existing agreements until after the council elections in 2016 or get back to the bargaining table in the second half of this year. Remaking the local government award and bargaining within the framework of this new act benefits local government employees by allowing them to bargain for the things that matter to them. I have offered to provide assistance to those councils needing to go through the enterprise bargaining process again and I look forward to working with local councils to ensure Queensland's IR system delivers positive outcomes in bargaining for Queensland's local government workforce.

When making wage determinations in arbitrated matters, the QIRC has always taken into account the arguments from the employer, which in these matters is the government, about their financial position. As Treasurer I can say that this is an eminently sensible thing to do. This is an obvious and commonsense approach. Under this bill the QIRC will continue to consider balancing social and economic needs. However, explicitly requiring the QIRC to take into account the fiscal strategy of the state, indeed to be briefed directly by the government on its fiscal strategy without an opportunity for employees to test what information is given, is simply inappropriate. It is simply inappropriate to make it mandatory for the QIRC to take into account the government of the day's fiscal policies without the ability to cross-examine that evidence.

Public servants are not greedy. They are reasonable people. As we have heard, some of the lowest paid people in our community often work for the local council. They are people in our communities. They are consumers. They are Queensland families. They deserve to have wage determinations made that take their interests into account and not just those of the employer. We are committed to restoring fairness for workers and that includes returning the QIRC to its position as a layperson's court where worker and union advocates operate on a level playing field with the employers. I thank the committee for its recommendation regarding a proposed amendment to enable the QIRC to develop a standard dispute resolution clause that could be available to parties and be able to be amended by mutual agreement. The bill removes the previously mandated prescription for the dispute resolution clause and in its place provides the QIRC with a broad ambit of what is to be included in a dispute resolution clause. The bill as presented supports the creation of a model dispute resolution clause by the QIRC as the independent tribunal and the appropriate body to prepare such a model clause should it prefer to do so. I will bring the committee's sound recommendation to the attention of the QIRC to be considered in the development of a default or model clause.

In our moment of need health professionals provide life-saving services for our loved ones. Queenslanders value the health care provided by health professionals. This bill and further amendments are designed to restore conditions that were ripped away from our doctors who, quite frankly, got the rough end of the pineapple—pardon the pun. The Newman LNP government did this to doctors. This bill is the first step in beginning to rebuild the trust between doctors and the Queensland government. It is very simple: a fairer workplace for our doctors and health professionals will mean better service delivery and better outcomes for patients. Our senior medical staff will be respected for their skills, valued for their professionalism and focused on delivering quality health services to the people of Queensland. This government is committed to ending unreasonable and unfair contracts for doctors and reinstating the right for all doctors to collectively bargain.

The LNP turned back the clock 25 years with its draconian IR laws. The previous LNP government's IR regime reduced job security and created a climate of fear and uncertainty in workplaces throughout the state. Its laws attacked the day-to-day conditions and take-home pay of hardworking Queenslanders. There has been a bit of discussion tonight about the LNP's election campaign review, the Borbidge Sheldon review. As members can imagine, my input was not sought in this review. I do agree with the two main reasons why those opposite are right now sitting opposite: the breaking of the promise that public servants had nothing to fear and the perception of arrogance arising from not listening to people. To those opposite I say listen to your constituents and listen to Queenslanders. Those opposite have 24,000 reasons to right a wrong; 24,000 reasons to learn from their mistakes; 24,000 reasons to support our public sector; and 24,000 reasons to support this bill. I call on members to support our public servants who work so hard to support our state. To all on this side of the House, let us bring on the vote!