




Speech By  
**Jarrold Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 September 2015

**WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND  
REHABILITATION (PROTECTING FIREFIGHTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.49 pm): I move—

That the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill be now read a second time.

I rise to speak to the private member's bill—the protecting firefighters legislation. I note that this is a cognate debate with the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I introduced the protecting firefighters legislation, and Ian Walker, the shadow Attorney-General, has asked me to comment on a few of the issues contained in the other piece of legislation we are dealing with in the cognate debate tonight.

I just heard the Treasurer speak and he went on with all this rhetoric—that this is about fairness for the employer and fairness for the worker, that they are listening and consulting. Well, it is not. This is about that old song *Solidarity Forever* and this is the union payback. This is one of the union payback bills. The legislation we have seen introduced into this parliament in the last six months has mostly been about undoing everything the LNP government did or paying back the unions—or in some instances both. We know that the preselections of a lot of members opposite are reliant on legislation that goes before this House and what is passed in this House. We know from question time this morning that donations are subject to what goes on in this House and what bills are debated in this House. We know that members opposite have all but come in here and—

**Ms Grace** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** We have a great former union official interjecting now. Let their voices be heard tonight, because I am 60 seconds in and I have not even started yet! Mr Deputy Speaker Ryan, I do apologise for the private conversation we had earlier where I said that everything would be very friendly tonight. The civilities lasted 60 seconds, Mr Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, I have heard members in the government come in here and all but sing that song *Solidarity Forever*. We heard a lot of it being sung out the front over the last few years. We heard a lot of the new members talk about comrades in their maiden speeches. I think it is the first time in Queensland's history that more union officials than family members have been thanked in maiden speeches. That is quite telling for a government. Is it any wonder when you look at this bill and other bills that have been brought before this House in the last few months? There are real issues facing Queenslanders—domestic violence, law and order on our streets, the lowest police morale in Queensland since the Fitzgerald days—but we continually come in here and debate bills that are really payback to the union. The Treasurer said only a few minutes ago, 'We are listening. We are consulting. The difference between this government and the former LNP government is that we are listening and we are consulting.'

**Mr Pitt:** Correct.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection. He said, 'Correct.' So what is the Treasurer's response to an email I received today at 12.12 pm—and I understand it was sent to all members in this House—from Nick Behrens from the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland? I will table this email later in the debate, but now I will get to the nuts and bolts of the email he sent to all members of parliament. Remember, this is the director of advocacy and workplace relations from CCIQ. He said—

Accordingly, CCIQ calls on your support to block the passage of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill.

So the peak business group in Queensland is saying to all the Labor members, all the LNP members, the crossbenchers and the Independents: 'Block this bill we are debating tonight. Block it.' The Treasurer said that he is listening, that they have listened, that they have consulted—but obviously not. That begs the question: if we are debating this bill tonight and if that is the view of the CCIQ, who did the Treasurer listen to? We know who he listened to. He listened to the unions, he listened to—

**Mr Pitt** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** The Treasurer raises the member for Coomera's report when he was the chair of the Finance and Administration Committee. In a minute I will talk about another report that I note the Treasurer did not mention in his little contribution. I will talk about that report because it is far more significant than the member for Coomera's report—and I am not denigrating the member for Coomera. I will tell the House what report I am talking about in a minute, but I will leave you in suspense on that one.

I recall when we had this debate with respect to workers compensation a couple of years ago that Labor members in the opposition at the time were saying, 'This is workers compensation. It is about the workers. What do the employers have to do with this?' Well, the employers pay for the workers compensation. The premiums are paid for by the employer. So when you look at workers compensation in Queensland, you ought to not just look at the employee who derives the benefits of the workers compensation scheme. If you did not have the employer, you would not have a scheme because there would be no money going into it. My concern is that every member of this chamber has been sent a letter this afternoon from the CCIQ. I assume that the Labor members would have hardworking chambers of commerce that are in each of their electorates.

**Mr Minnikin:** A lot of small businesses.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** There are a lot of small businesses in all of their electorates. When the debate unfolds this evening I will be keen to see how they respond to the email from the CCIQ. When this bill passes either late this evening or tomorrow, how will they go out to their small businesses in their electorates and say, 'The Labor government is about small business in Queensland but essentially we have just jacked up your workers compensation by about 20 per cent'?

**Mr Pitt:** We've heard it all before.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** You have not heard it all before; you have another 53 minutes to hear. The issue here is that when introducing the bill the Treasurer said that they would achieve the level of \$1.20 for average premiums that the LNP achieved. It is quite interesting because when he was in opposition he actually claimed credit for the reduction in the workers compensation premium. I recall saying at the time that the member of parliament had achieved more in opposition than any government had achieved in Queensland because he claimed credit for the reduction because of changes they made in 2010. The reality of that was that the chairman of the WorkCover board, Mr Glenn Ferguson, who is the current chair of the WorkCover board, wrote to the government at the time saying that, yes, the 2010 amendments had an impact on the reduction of the average premium of \$1.20, but without the 2013 amendments they would not have been able to achieve the \$1.20 average premium.

The Treasurer tries to be tricky. We know he has been coin tossing in this place before. He likes a magic trick. He is trying to fool the Queensland public by saying that passing this legislation tonight will not have an impact on workers compensation. What he fails to understand is that when you put pressure on the workers compensation scheme and then the economy goes bust, stagnates or goes down and you do not have the money there, then the premium will start to rise again. It will start to skyrocket again, like it did under the former Labor government.

The Treasurer says that businesses will wake up tomorrow and will still be paying a premium of \$1.20. However, we know they are using some of the solvency money and the reason the money is there is for a rainy day. If there is not the protection of having the money there for the scheme, when the worker needs it most, the employer will not have the money there to pay for it.

The Treasurer is also being tricky when he talks about the premium of \$1.20. Members of this parliament will understand that the premium of \$1.20 is an average premium. Not all businesses in

Queensland pay \$1.20; some pay more and some pay a little less because we have the industry rates as well. If a business is on an industry rate for clothing, textile, abattoir—whatever the case may be—it may be a little more than \$1.20. But the minute they have a common law claim and they have to fork out \$200,000 to \$300,000, their premium skyrockets. So the Treasurer cannot come in here and say to the people of Queensland, 'This is not going to impact on premiums,' because he knows that this is an average premium. When individual businesses are struck by common law claims, the industry rate can rise. Also WorkCover can insure more against the individual business and they can be paying more; and they will not be paying \$1.20. Let us get that sorted out. I know that other members will also be speaking about it.

Ultimately, the question for the Treasurer when he says they have listened is: what does he say to the CCIQ, which just sent a letter to his office that said, 'Do not pass this legislation'? Labor members in this House with small businesses in their electorates will find that their local representative chambers of commerce are saying, 'Do not pass this legislation.' They will go out next week and talk to their small businesses and try to convince them that the legislation the government is passing either tonight or tomorrow is in the best interests of small business. It is not.

We know what this is about. It is about two groups in Queensland. It is, of course, about the union movement and it is about greedy lawyers. Two years ago those greedy lawyers protested out the front of Parliament House and do honourable members know what they said? They said, 'Workers' rights, workers' rights.' Do these members not think that the personal injuries lawyers advocating for this change to the common law threshold did not have a little self-interest at heart in this debate? I am not sure—

**Mr Costigan** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection, although I do not know how I can take that. The member will have to yell it out.

**Mr Crandon:** A big bit.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** A big bit of self-interest, as the member for Coomera says. The Queensland public, employers and the CCIQ are not fooled by all the lobbying we have seen come through our offices from the Lawyers Alliance and so forth that they are doing because it is in the best interests of the worker. I recall the Treasurer and the then shadow Attorney-General said that when the legislation was passed and the common law threshold of five per cent was introduced there were going to be cases of people not being able to make claims under common law. I cannot recall once in two years the Treasurer standing in this place after the laws were passed and bringing an issue into this place saying, 'XYZ has been wronged by this legislation.' There was one I recall that he mentioned. I used the hypothetical answer that someone might just be a serial complainant. The person they trot in here as a reason why they needed to change the legislation was a serial complainant. The Queensland community, the business community are not going to cop it.

What the crossbenchers and the Independents of this parliament need to understand is that the CCIQ have this afternoon issued notice to all members of parliament saying, 'Do not pass this legislation.' In fact, they used the work 'block'. I am not going to read it into *Hansard*, but I am happy to table a copy of the items that the CCIQ wish to bring to the attention of honourable members.

They have four points. This is a paragraph I probably should read out. It says—

CCIQ has received assurances from the State Government that these amendments will not impact the State's capacity to maintain premiums at \$1.20 per \$100 in wages on average for Queensland employers despite—

here is the kicker—

WorkCover Queensland's—

and, remember, WorkCover Queensland is the body that actually sets the premiums—

confirmation that the impact of the changes will mean the breakeven premium will need to rise to \$1.36.

WorkCover Queensland sets the premiums based on the actuaries and so forth and the Labor government has said no change despite the fact that WorkCover Queensland's confirmation that the impact of the changes will mean that the break-even premium will need to rise to \$1.36. When I was the minister responsible for this legislation I heard stories when I travelled to abattoirs and other places that had issues with workplace health and safety—and they made some great improvements in workplace health and safety. They were telling me the biggest concern they had as a small or even a large business was workers compensation premiums; they were killing their businesses. They had set about making great changes to their workplaces so that they had lower injuries, but the minute they had a common law claim—and remember there was no impairment threshold. It was not even zero per cent. So no matter what injury a person sustained if they did not want to go to the statutory scheme, they

would go to the common law claim. We put the five per cent in place which said the injury had to have a whole body impairment of five per cent and it has been working well. Businesses are happy; employees are happy. No-one out there has been protesting in the streets for the past two years saying they are unhappy with the scheme. No-one has been protesting.

**Miss Boyd** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection. Not even the unions have been protesting in the last 12 months that the scheme is bad.

**Mr Powell** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** You did not say union? Repeat it so I can carry on with that.

When we introduced the bill the unions did protest. Once the legislation passed and people actually saw the benefits of it and the fact that no-one was worse off, no-one protested. Then we had an election, a socialist government was elected, they came in here just to pay back the unions and we get this sort of legislation come through. No-one has had an issue with it.

**Mrs Smith** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the honourable member about the cost to business. This will cost business. I have heard stories firsthand from businesses across Queensland that, because of these changes, they will have somewhere in the order of \$200,000 to \$500,000 in workers compensation premiums. How many people can they employ with that sort of money, additional employees?

**Mr Pitt:** The premiums are not going up.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the Treasurer that the premium is not going up. The premium will go up. It will go up because the Labor Party will do what the Labor Party always does: spend the money, and there will be nothing in there for a rainy day. When it does rain—and it will; based on economic forecasts last week it will rain—the Labor Treasurer will stand up and say, 'There is no money. We have to increase premiums.' That is what is going to happen. That is what has always happened.

The honourable Treasurer uses the report of the member for Coomera and the former finance committee as an excuse for having to introduce this. Let us go back to a report done in 2009-10. Does the Treasurer know which one I am referring to?

**Mr Pitt:** I am still in suspense.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Keep it that way. He will recall that the LNP was not in government in 2009-10. So it was obviously a Labor government. A report was produced in 2009-10 by the WorkCover board, a board appointed by the Labor Party. Guess who the chairman of the board was? Does anyone want to hazard a guess?

**Ms Leahy:** Could be a union member.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** No, it is better than that. Does anyone want to hazard a guess? The newly elected members will not have a clue who this is.

**Mr Powell** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Yes, I take the interjection from the member for Glass House. The chairman of the WorkCover board was Labor luminary Ian Brusasco. Ian Brusasco was in charge of the fundraising for the Labor Party. He was chair of the WorkCover board, produced a report in 2009 and said that the government should introduce a common law threshold of not five per cent, but 10 to 15 per cent. So we had the Labor Party's chief financial fundraiser, the chairman of WorkCover, saying the Labor government at the time should introduce changes to WorkCover of a 10 to 15 per cent threshold on common law claims. Now, that would have been spectacular.

Well, it was spectacular that it was from a Labor luminary, but it was more spectacular because other jurisdictions in Australia have 15 to 20 per cent and I think one of them has a 30 per cent threshold. So Queensland pales into comparison with a five per cent common law threshold. We were the lowest and we were the only jurisdiction in Australia to keep journey claims to protect the workers. We kept it at a five per cent common law threshold, and that was how we were able to reduce the premium from \$1.45 to \$1.20, saving small business in Queensland 17 per cent. The Labor governments in other jurisdictions had introduced these common law thresholds somewhere up around the 20 and 30 per cent mark. Ian Brusasco, the Labor luminary, said that we should have a 10 to 15 per cent common law threshold. The current threshold of five per cent in Queensland is an extremely low threshold compared to other jurisdictions around the country.

I think that Queenslanders, who have now experienced approximately six to seven months of this government, understand what this government is about. This new government is not about the people. The government is not about small business in Queensland. The business community that we are talking to on this side of the House do not believe the Treasurer when he says they want to be open for business and they are a small business government. Those opposite do not like small business; the Labor Party never have. They have never liked medium enterprise business. They like unions, and they do everything they can to protect the unions.

**Ms Leahy** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take interjection from the member for Warrego, which is a beautiful place. I was there recently; thank you for the visit. Member for Warrego, I take your interjection: the union bosses. As I said, when you look through their maiden speeches, when you have to thank the union movement more than your family, the state is in trouble. That is essentially what has happened.

We have a situation now where the CCIQ are coming out and saying to members in this House, 'Do not support the workers compensation legislation.' You have small businesses out there who are being told by the Treasurer and Premier, 'This is a small business government. This is a pro-business government and we are open for business,' yet tonight the Treasurer of the state is going to slug small business in the state another 20 per cent for workers compensation. Let history record that when Labor gets its hands on it and makes these amendments to workers compensation—we consulted and we had the committee report, and thank you for the report—

**Ms Jones** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the minister, who was not in the chamber at the time so I will give her a little history lesson on this particular subject. The committee did produce a report. The reason we asked the committee to produce a report was to look at the issue of workers compensation. We looked at the report and we accepted a lot of the recommendations, rejected a couple of the recommendations and ended up with a scheme that by all accounts everyone seems happy with. Employees seem happy with it, employers seem happy with it, personal injury lawyers are not happy with it and other states are happy with it.

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the member for Lockyer. Before you arrived in the chamber I was talking about Ian Brusasco, who in fact recommended the 10 to 15 per cent common law threshold claim. The member has missed a good 20 minutes of my speech, but I am happy to go over the points I made again for the member for Lockyer. I will now table the letter from the CCIQ saying that the honourable members should not pass this legislation tonight.

*Tabled paper.* Email, dated 16 September 2015, from the Director, Advocacy & Workplace Relations, Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland, Mr Nick Behrens, to Members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, regarding the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2015 [\[1104\]](#).

I also have a letter that I want to draw to members' attention. I do not want to table it because I tabled it on 22 May 2014. This is a letter from WorkCover Queensland dated 21 May 2014 to the Attorney-General. Glenn Ferguson writes to congratulate the government for making the necessary legislative reforms that have enabled WorkCover to provide Queensland employers with the lowest average premium rate in the nation. If we want to be a state which seeks investment and gets business to come to Queensland, we should have the lowest premium in the nation. The chair of WorkCover, Mr Glenn Ferguson, also states—

I note recent media statements regarding the premium announcement. The legislative amendments in 2010 provided a period of premium stability, as evidenced by the following premium rates.

...

During this period, WorkCover also received very positive investment returns which added to the financial viability of the fund.

**Mrs Frecklington** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Member for Nanango, he further states—

However, it is important to note that without the 2013 legislative amendments, WorkCover would not have been able to reduce the average premium rate to the extent that it has for 2014/15, that is \$1.20.

**Mr Pitt:** Incorrect.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Not correct? Everyone is gossiping, so you are obviously not interested in what I am saying. When I quoted the chair of WorkCover back in 2014, the Treasurer said 'not correct'. The Treasurer of the state of Queensland is rejecting advice from the chair of the WorkCover board that it was able to achieve \$1.20. Incidentally, this is the same chair of the WorkCover board that is giving advice to this Treasurer. By his interjection that this letter is not correct, does this Treasurer not have

confidence in the WorkCover board? The Treasurer has no confidence in the WorkCover board because he said it is not correct. The reason I raise this again is because when the business community was getting behind these laws back in May 2014, the Treasurer, on Anastacia Palaszczuk MP letterhead at the time, put out that extraordinary—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much conversation in the chamber. There will be no conversation across the chamber, members. The member for Kawana has the call.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Do members recall when the Treasurer had Mythbusters and believed in asset sales and then did not believe in asset sales? We have outlived Mythbusters, but I would like to refer to a press release that the shadow treasurer at the time, Curtis Pitt, put out dated 20 May 2014. The headline here is 'Desperate LNP takes credit for Labor's WorkCover premium decrease'.

Let us get this straight. In 2009-10 we had Ian Brusasco, the chair of WorkCover, saying that we should introduce common law thresholds of 10 to 15 per cent. That was rejected by the government. In fact, I think the health minister was the Attorney-General at the time who may have rejected that from Labor luminary Brusasco. Then in 2012 the new government introduced common law thresholds of five per cent, which was certainly under what Labor luminary Ian Brusasco wanted. We then had a couple of years of relative stability, and when the shadow Treasurer at the time worked out how good our legislative amendments were, he took a desperate step and put out a press release claiming credit for it while in opposition and said it was all because of the 2010 amendments. This is despite the fact that the chair of WorkCover put out a press release saying that the 2010 amendments helped, but they could not have achieved the \$1.20 premium without the 2013 amendments.

The Labor Party are always trying to rewrite history but all the Treasurer has to do is go back to *Hansard* and look at what he said at the time. He should have a look at the ridiculous press release he put out at the time which, incidentally, I do not think got a run anywhere because no-one believed it because it was unbelievable. In his response tonight the Treasurer really has to answer some fundamental questions. If he says that he has consulted and if he says that he is listening, he is obviously not listening to CCIQ because—

**Mr Pitt** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Oh, a reference group! He says that he set up a reference group. Let me guess: is the reference group represented by personal injury lawyers here, unions here, workers here and employers here? He probably had one representative in the reference group from the CCIQ. Is it any wonder that they were outvoted, despite the fact the CCIQ members have to pay the premium so the employee has cover in the first place? Do you know what, Treasurer? Businesses go broke because of these premiums.

**Mr Costigan:** They go broke under Labor.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the member for Whitsunday. Businesses go broke under Labor; businesses do not employ people. In many electorates there are some businesses that have saved upwards of \$500,000. How many workers can be employed because of that saving? If they save \$500,000 they could hire another five, six or seven employees. That means more employees are working. That means the unemployment rate decreases in Queensland. That means more food on the table for struggling families in Queensland. How can that not be a good thing? Creating jobs, saving businesses money and having a scheme that people can rely on and not whinge about in two years— all the best of all those worlds lining up, and they are going to throw it all out tonight because union bosses control this government.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I hear members opposite interjecting. I am looking at one particular member, but so insignificant is the member that I never remember her electorate. She is looking right at me. Can someone tell me which is her electorate? I cannot recall.

**Mrs Smith:** Pine Rivers.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** The member for Pine Rivers gets up in here and talks about 'the comrades'. I hope the member for Pine Rivers is on the speaking list. Oh, no, she is not on the list. I encourage the member for Pine Rivers to put herself on the list and defend the unions tonight. I would love to be a fly on the wall when she walks into a small business in her electorate, because the Pine Rivers community, like any community with a small business focus—

**Miss Boyd:** They love me, mate.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Small businesses love you, do they?

**Miss Boyd:** Yes.

**Mr Costigan** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Ryan): Order! I will wait for the House to come back to order. Member for Whitsunday, it is disorderly to interject but it is highly disorderly to interject from a seat other than your own. Member for Kawana, it is getting a bit heated. I ask you to return to the bill and direct your comments to the question before the House.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The member for Pine Rivers has just interjected and said that small businesses in her community love her. Following the passage of this legislation I look forward to seeing the postcards which state, 'I love you back so much that I am increasing your premiums by 20 per cent.' I look forward to those postcards going out to the Pine Rivers electorate. I can guarantee her one thing: if she does not send out those postcards, we will. That is guaranteed. I am quickly running out of time.

**Mrs Frecklington** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection of the member for Nanango. I am fast running out of time, but I do have a lot more to say. Before I return to union bosses, thugs and everything that the Labor Party represents tonight in this legislation, I want to turn to firefighters—another piece of hypocrisy that is shown here tonight.

**Ms Grace:** We are all here because of him, and you all know it.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** There are only a few people who can hold a record for getting voted out by your constituents and then coming back. Not many people hold a record for getting voted out of office.

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Honourable members!

**Mr BLEIJIE:** The waves of Brisbane Central; the tide comes in and out of Brisbane Central. It went out in 2012 for the member for Brisbane Central. It came back in 2015 and it will go out again shortly, I can assure her of that.

Let us talk about firefighters. On behalf of the LNP, I pay tribute to all the firefighters in Queensland. We have auxiliary firefighters, we have part-time firefighters, we have rural firefighter volunteers and we have full-time firefighters. Full-time and auxiliary firefighters drive the big red trucks and our rural firefighters drive yellow trucks. I find it amazing that the likes of the member for Pumicestone would laugh when talking about firefighters driving red and yellow trucks, because I bet he does not understand the difference between the yellow and red trucks and the importance of these men and women who serve our communities by protecting the member for Pumicestone's own electorate and constituents. I think his constituents would be horrified that he would make a joke of men and women serving in the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. The member for Pumicestone has a lot to be ashamed about already in his role in this place, and I think tonight he has added to it. Well done!

We have about 30,000 to 35,000 rural firefighters across Queensland, and we have approximately 15,000 active rural firefighters. We also have over 2,000 full-time firefighters, our urban firefighters, who drive red trucks. Our rural firefighters, particularly in rural and regional Queensland, drive yellow trucks, and we have our auxiliary firefighters who do an amazing job as well. Prior to the last election the former LNP government had an accord with the firefighters. We said that we would introduce presumptive legislation. In order for members to fully appreciate presumptive legislation, it is this: under workers compensation legislation at the moment a firefighter is generally covered if they contract cancer or get injured in the course of their employment. The problem is that under the current scheme they have to prove the nexus between the injury and the work. They have to prove that the injury was sustained in the line of duty or because of their work.

Presumptive legislation is a little different. Presumptive legislation allows them to receive workers compensation payments, payouts and protections, but it also means that if one contracts cancer it is presumed for the purposes of the workers compensation claim that it was caused by their work. There are a couple of provisions with respect to the types of cancer. There are about 11 or 12 types of cancer. There are times of service that you must serve in the fire service because of the different types of cancer, which everyone accepts. In some communities auxiliary firefighters and rural firefighters serve from the same headquarters and sometimes can be called out to the same incident. If there is a crash on the road or a grassfire, those two can be called out at the same time.

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** There you go; thank you for that. When a firefighter attends a bushfire or a grassfire, for instance, they are not sure which toxins will be present—whether someone has dumped rubbish or

tyres—and they go straight in and they are not protected. The LNP in opposition said that we would provide presumptive legislation. A couple of months ago I was very proud on behalf of the LNP to introduce presumptive legislation. Our presumptive legislation is the most generous presumptive legislation in the country for firefighters. When I talk about firefighters under our legislation, I am talking about rural, part-time, auxiliary and urban full-time firefighters. We talk about all firefighters. We have a definition of firefighters which contains all those wonderful Queenslanders who protect us from fires.

The unfortunate issue in this debate is that the Labor Party introduced its own presumptive legislation, but there was a major difference between the LNP legislation and the Labor Party legislation. The difference was full discrimination against rural firefighters. It is a slap in the face to 30,000 rural firefighters in Queensland. What the Labor Party said in its bill is that if you are an auxiliary or full-time firefighter and you attend a fire and you contract cancer you will be covered under this. But if you are a rural firefighter or a hardworking volunteer and you attend the same fire and you get cancer you are not covered unless you have attended 150 fires and unless you can prove you have attended 150 fires.

It was shameful. What was more shameful was that in this whole debate the member for Bundamba, the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrective Services, never raised an issue publicly about this discrimination. She let it go for months. The LNP bill—a non-discriminatory bill—covered all firefighters while the Labor bill discriminates against 30,000 rural firefighters, and the member for Bundamba let the Treasurer take charge of it. She never made a comment as Minister for Emergency Services responsible for rural fireys—not a comment. The only comment she made in this place was to congratulate the Treasurer, who is about to introduce presumptive legislation into this chamber—that was all she said—but she did not stick up for the rural fireys when they realised that a bill had been introduced with this discrimination of 150 in it. I am pleased that, because of the hard work from the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland and Justin Choveaux and all the rural fireys in Queensland, we now have a government amendment before the House which will get rid of the 150 fires that the rural fireys have to attend and that will end the discrimination.

On that point, the member for Bundaberg has just taken her seat, so let us talk about the member for Bundaberg. The member for Bundaberg used the department of fire and emergency services to send out political propaganda in her electorate. An apolitical department—a department in which public servants are not meant to be politicised—was politicised by the member for Bundaberg who used her office to send out misleading information. So misleading was that information that the Treasurer is now forced to come in here and delete the 150 provision. She sent out information saying that the Labor bill was better than the LNP bill! She said that everyone will be protected under their bill and the LNP is spreading all of this misunderstanding and misinformation. If it was misinformation and misunderstanding, why is the Labor government moving amendments to its own bill tonight?

Why did the Labor members on the committee put forward a recommendation saying that it was wrong? In fact, the chairman of the committee commented that the Labor Party bill was unworkable. The Labor committee members said that the Labor bill was unworkable and said to delete the 150. Do I think this was done out of a good gesture for the rural fireys? Do I think that was the case? I wish it was, but I tell you why this is being done. The reason those opposite are introducing this bill is that they are worried our bill would pass this chamber. They knew it would pass this chamber, because who would turn their back on a rural firefighter in Queensland? Who would turn their back on a rural firefighter? Who would slap a rural firefighter in the face when they introduced this legislation and say, 'You're not worthy of protection if you have cancer unless you've served for 150 fires and you show us the pieces of paper to prove you've served for 150 fires'?

**Mr Byrne** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection from the member for Rockhampton, the Minister for Sport, and note him shaking his head. I did not—

**Mr Byrne:** You're an embarrassment!

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take the interjection about being an embarrassment. The only embarrassment here is the fact that the Labor government introduced discriminatory legislation against rural firefighters in Queensland. That is what the embarrassment is, member for Rockhampton—not the fact that you have to come in here and change it but the fact that the Labor Party—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Furner): Order! You will address your comments through the chair.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** The only embarrassment here should be on the face of the member for Rockhampton, because the Labor Party introduced discriminatory legislation. I am sure that the member for Rockhampton has rural fireys in his electorate. I would have liked to have known what he said to the rural fireys: 'Oh well, we've introduced presumptive legislation but you're not covered unless you attend



150 fires, but if you're an auxiliary firefighter you're covered, if you're an urban firefighter you're covered.' How a government could even contemplate and then introduce legislation into this place with such discrimination is beyond me but not beyond the Labor Party because it does not have a plan, it does not know what it is doing and it acts on a whim because it has no planning and no clear plan in fact for what it is going to do.

For those Labor members who want to shake their heads at any of the contributions from me or the other members on this side of the chamber tonight, the fact will always remain—despite the fact that I assume the LNP bill will get voted down tonight because the amendments will go through in the Labor bill—that the Labor Party will be known as the ones who introduced discriminatory legislation against rural firefighters and we will tell every rural firefighter who asks, and I can assure all Labor members that there have been a lot who have been asking. They know because the member for Bundaberg got the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services to send out a political letter—something I have never seen done before, so much so that the commissioner for fireys, Ms Carroll, even admitted at estimates that it was the wrong thing to do and that the department should not have sent out political letters. But what would you expect from the Labor Party when a Labor member goes to their local fire bureaucrats and says, 'I want you to send this out to people and explain the difference between the LNP bill and the Labor bill'?

The rural fireys did not need an explanation. They knew clearly what was going on. They knew exactly what was going on, and they knew that the Labor Party introduced discriminatory legislation and that the LNP started this process. I want to pay tribute to the Rural Fire Brigades Association Queensland that did an outstanding job in its campaign right around Queensland. It did such an outstanding job that the Labor government committee members were forced to recommend changes against their own government's legislation and so outstanding was its campaign that Labor government members will be forced to vote on their legislation with an amendment. It is not really an amendment amending a clause; it is an amendment deleting a clause like it was never there. That is what those opposite want. I suspect that they would like to go back in time a little bit and wish they had never put it in there, but they did and it will be forever on the record that they did.

When all of the Labor members go back to their communities next week and tell them how great they are with small business when they have just increased premiums by 20 per cent, they can then go and have scones with the rural fireys and tell them that they had all of this legislation that was great for rural firefighters. For every business they go into claiming their workers compensation changes are good for business, we will have already been there and told the business the truth. For every rural firefighter they want to get in a photo with and tell them how great their legislation is, we will have already been there. They will know. The rural fireys will know when the Labor member for Pumicestone and the Labor member for Pine Rivers all show up for their photographs with rural fireys and their yellow trucks. They will know that they were sold out by the Labor Party. They were sold out by the Labor Party, which has been forced to come in here and amend its own legislation.

I have to say that it is a pretty substantial amendment. Those opposite did not reduce it from 150 to 70 to 50 to 10; they are just deleting it like it never existed. It is very similar to the LNP bill. In fact, it is like a copy of the LNP bill, so I think the Labor Party should just vote for the LNP bill. Tonight if I had my way Labor members would do the honourable thing in realising that they completely got this one wrong and completely discriminated against the rural fireys and they should just vote with the LNP. I am a man of bipartisanship on most occasions—on some occasions—and I think the grown-up thing here would be for the Labor government to put down its weapons this evening in the battle of parliament and vote—

**Mr Costigan:** An armistice.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Yes, call an armistice. Those opposite should put down their weapons and vote with the LNP. The LNP bill is a far greater bill. It offers far greater protection than the Labor bill ever will, so I think they should just acknowledge that they got it wrong. The Treasurer says that he is listening to Queenslanders because they are moving an amendment. Do not worry about moving the amendment. Save us all some time tomorrow and just vote for the LNP bill. Vote for the LNP bill to give the best protection to rural fireys. I say to the crossbenchers and the Independents: do not just vote with the Labor Party on its amendments; vote with the LNP. Vote with the LNP. Vote with the LNP to support rural firefighters and all the other firefighters in Queensland. Vote with the LNP to support small business. Small business creates jobs in this state. Politicians do not create jobs, governments do not create jobs; small business creates jobs in this state. The government's responsibility is to create an economic environment in which small business can prosper.

**An opposition member** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take that interjection. Governments provide the framework for business to prosper. I have been in this place for almost seven years now. The members of the Labor Party come in here and never talk about small business. They go out, they have these little reviews, these seminars and these talkfests. Today, the advocate for North Queensland was in here saying that she is going to hold another summit. I do not know how many summits they are up to. Someone suggested four or five. I am not quite sure what the outcomes of the other summits were. For the members of the Labor Party, it is about ticking boxes. It is so they can stand up and say, 'We had a summit on that.' They do not know what the outcomes were. They do not intend to do anything with it. Kevin Rudd was the same. Do members remember the 2020 summit that he held in Canberra? Nobody knows what happened with that. The members of the Labor Party are all the same. They just tick a box.

**Mr BYRNE:** I rise to a point of order. Mr Deputy Speaker, is it at all possible to bring the member back to something approaching the bill?

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Mr Deputy Speaker, on the point of order—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Furner): Order! Member for Kawana, we are debating the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation (Protecting Firefighters) Amendment Bill in cognate. I draw you back to those matters.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. For the benefit of the member for Rockhampton, the honourable minister, I point out that workers compensation has a little bit to do with small business. I was commenting on the summit for small business in North Queensland that the Labor Party announced this morning. I say to the member for Rockhampton that I would have thought that a summit on small business creation and workers compensation, which drives the economy of small business and the efficiency of small business, is pretty well connected. That shows one thing. The member for Rockhampton has just confirmed to this House that the Labor government has no interest in small business and does not care what happens with small business—hence why we have this bill tonight.

We suspect that there will be a 20 per cent increase in workers compensation premiums in the electorates of those opposite. That 20 per cent increase in workers compensation premiums will flow on. The Treasurer has said on occasion that there is plenty of solvency in the workers compensation fund. That did not happen by accident. It happened because of government policy and regulation. There is money there and that money has meant that WorkCover can reduce the premium. If WorkCover does not have any money—

**Mr Power:** Thanks, Cameron.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take that interjection. The member is thanking the health minister, who at the time was the attorney-general. The member may not have heard me earlier, but a letter from the chair of WorkCover advising the Labor government was tabled. In that letter he said—

However, it is important to note that without the 2013 legislative amendments, WorkCover would not have been able to reduce the ... premium.

The LNP government was in power in 2013. I know that the member was not in this place at that time, but he should not come into this place and try to rewrite history and say how good the Labor Party is for business, because it is not. In 2010, the Labor government made amendments to WorkCover, but the attorney-general at the time, Cameron Dick, had recommendations from Ian Brusasco, the chair of WorkCover at the time, to introduce common law thresholds of 10 per cent to 15 per cent, which was rejected by the attorney-general and the government at that time. It was then the former LNP government that introduced a five per cent common law threshold, against the wishes of Ian Brusasco, who wanted a 10 per cent to 15 per cent common law threshold. It is now this Labor government that is ripping that out. This will lead to increased premiums for every small business in Queensland.

I have just attended the 15-year anniversary of Australian Off Road. That company builds a fantastic camper. That business used to be based in the Kawana electorate, but it is now based in the Caloundra electorate. That company is now a growing, national company. If people want to buy a camper or a caravan from Australian Off Road, there is now a 10-month wait. It is a fantastic local company. When I went to see them years ago as a local member they were telling me the extraordinary bills that they had to pay for workers compensation above the average premium. It was that sort of feedback that the LNP received right across Queensland that led us to make the necessary changes to get the average workers compensation premium down from \$1.45 to \$1.20.

I go back to that interjection by the member for Logan. We do not have a \$1.20 premium—the lowest premium in the nation—because of the Labor government. It was because of the LNP government and tonight the Labor government is ripping all of that up as part of this whole 'de-Newmanisation' of Queensland. The Labor government is ripping up that legislation and the people who

will suffer will be small businesses, medium sized businesses and large business in Queensland. That is who will suffer.

All the rhetoric that the members opposite gave at the time the LNP introduced that legislation—'The world is going to come to an end. Workers will not be entitled to common law claims'—just proved to be nonsense. Workers received their claims. If they had a common law claim they could get it. If they fell under the five per cent threshold they would get a statutory claim. In the two years since that legislation was introduced I cannot recall sad situations being raised in this House where people could not get what they ordinarily would have been entitled to.

The other matter that I want to raise—

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I am fast running out of time. I am 55 minutes down. The other matter that I wanted to raise is that, when we debated that legislation, we moved an amendment that meant that an employer could get a copy of the claims history of an employee. That was not a snooping exercise; that was an exercise to work out if the employer was going to be subjected to a series of complaints that a potential employee had made to other employers, particularly if they worked in the agricultural sector. From farm to farm—

**An opposition member:** Strawberry farmers.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Strawberry farmers—employees going from farm to farm saying, 'I bent over and hurt my back.' 'Claim here.' Then they would go to the next business and that employer did not have any knowledge of that. If a citizen signs up to a health insurance policy, that person has to disclose pre-existing ailments. They have to disclose all sorts of things. If a person takes out house insurance they have to say how many claims they have made in the past seven years. That practice is a standard part of society. Again, to protect the unions, tonight this government is ripping that up. It is out the window.

If the Labor government is truly listening, then it should listen to the CCIQ, which today sent a letter to all the offices of all the Labor members right around Queensland on behalf of their small-business membership. That letter told the Labor members to block the legislation that it is about to embark on. The members of the government are about to get up and speak about their comrades and read whatever the CFMEU or the ETU have sent them to say. I would just caution the Labor members to not be as excited in quoting union officials in this place any longer, because in Queensland and around the nation we are slowly seeing unravel the systemic corruption in the union movement. So if I were them I would just take a little step back in my enthusiasm in endorsing the union movement. But we are about to hear another day of that as the members opposite go into this debate.

In the last few minutes that I have, I want to talk about the firefighters. On behalf of the LNP, I want to place on the record our great thanks to the firefighters in Queensland. Like the police, the ambulance and other emergency services, whether it is a fire or an emergency situation in a city, when communities step out our firefighters and our emergency services workers step in. Whether you are a rural firefighter, or an urban firefighter, or an auxiliary firefighter, I want to place on record our ultimate thanks to those service men and women in those professions. They do an outstanding job in protecting our communities, keeping Queenslanders safe, responding to the health and safety needs of our society. They do an amazing job and they should be thanked absolutely for that. On behalf of the LNP I thank all of those courageous men and women in those emergency services. We owe it to those firefighters who put their lives on the line, including the rural firefighters, to give them this protection.

We owe the same level of protection to rural firefighters, urban firefighters and full-time firefighters. We are talking here about people with cancer. There is no good outcome in this situation. A person who is claiming this cover has got the raw end of the deal: they have got cancer. Many Queenslanders have cancer. My mother is a survivor of cancer. That has led my family to support as many cancer organisations as we can. We are very blessed that mum is still alive and in remission. However, not so many Queenslanders are so lucky. When you are put in harm's way like our firefighters the state should be there to back you up. The state should be there to protect you in your hour of need and you should not have to fight the state for your compensation. That is why we introduced the private member's bill that protected all firefighters. I call on all members on the crossbenches not to pay lip-service and move an amendment of this and that, but to support the LNP bill because it was truly a bill that protected and backed all our firefighters no matter what colour fire truck they drove.