




Speech By
Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (4.07 pm), in reply: I thank honourable members for the contributions to the debate yesterday, late into this morning and then the sterling effort from the member for Whitsunday, who has just rounded off the debate. I think it is quite telling in this cognate debate that we are debating both the firefighters protection legislation, which is the private member's bill, and the government's workers compensation bill. Listening to the debate, I think there has been quite a compare and contrast between the LNP's provisions and our stance on a few things like protecting employers from the heightened costs of workers compensation, which will inevitably happen—and the CCIQ have confirmed that—and also our view that we treat all firefighters, rural or otherwise, in Queensland with the same dignity and respect.

The debate with respect to some of the members opposite has been quite shameful. I heard people saying today that the LNP was accusing people of hating rural firefighters and all of that sort of thing. The simple reality is that, when the government introduces legislation into this place saying that if people contract cancer not only do they have to prove 150 fire events but they also have to provide evidence of the 150 fires and it has to say that to a man or woman who potentially is dying of cancer, that is pretty upsetting. That is pretty much a slap in the face to rural firefighters in Queensland as opposed to other provisions under which urban firefighters and auxiliary firefighters quite rightly are entitled to the workers compensation provisions. As we indicated, this workers compensation applies at the moment, but the burden is on the firefighter to prove that the cancer was contracted during the course of the employment. This presumptive legislation changes that. I am proud that the LNP government was the first government in Queensland to introduce presumptive legislation for firefighters.

The way I see this eventuating is that the government bill will get up with their amendments and the LNP bill will fall, but let it be known—and the record will show—that the LNP were the first government in Queensland to introduce presumptive legislation for all firefighters: auxiliary, full-time, part-time, urban, rural and volunteer.

We also dealt with the issue of the workers compensation changes. As I indicated, the LNP opposition will be opposing those changes and standing up for the changes that we made in 2013, which saved businesses across Queensland on average 17 per cent in workers compensation. The government's bill is an attack on employers in this state and it is an attack on small business. The conversations that I am advised have taken place today with the likes of CCIQ and other people clearly indicate that the government have not listened to small business and the peak advocacy group. I want to pay tribute to the CCIQ, who continually stand up for the rights of their members, because we know that the economy in Queensland is driven by small business.

All of our electorates have small, medium and large enterprises, but the majority are small businesses which keep the cogs moving and the oil flowing in the economic machine. I pay tribute to

all of our small businesses. We will be opposing the government's bill because it will increase workers compensation—maybe not next week, the week after or next year—but inevitably workers compensation will increase as a result of these changes and the government will stand condemned. The Treasurer will stand up in a few minutes and say that they have listened to the community and they have listened to everyone. Well, they have not because the CCIQ do not want the bill passed, and if they listened to the peak business group in Queensland they would not be passing the legislation. In a few minutes when the Treasurer stands up and says, 'We are a new type of government. We are consulting and we are listening,' he will be waxing lyrical. There may have been a bit of consultation, but there has not been much listening to the business community. Unions and other self-interest groups will make a lot of money out of the changes that are about to be put forward through the House.

I want to thank my colleagues, particularly the LNP, for sticking up for rural firefighters, volunteers in this state and small business, which creates jobs and opportunities for young Queenslanders. We will be opposing the government's legislation with respect to the workers compensation changes, particularly the Commonwealth threshold.

I would encourage those members opposite to support the LNP opposition bill on rural firefighters and presumptive legislation for all firefighters, because that is by far the fairest way to achieve the policy objective. Tomorrow when government members go back to their electorates they will be talking to rural firefighters who will say, 'But wasn't the government the one that had the 150 fire events?' They will claim, 'No. It will be wiped off because of an amendment the Treasurer is about to move.' But we will keep reminding people that it did contain discriminatory legislation—150 fire events for rural firefighters—and they cannot wipe it off the bill that was introduced into the House originally. I do not know how a member of parliament, particularly the Treasurer, could have ever contemplated introducing legislation into this place which says that, if you have cancer, your life is worth more than someone who drives a yellow truck, a rural firefighter—

Mr Pitt interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection from the Treasurer, who says that is not the case. I did not introduce legislation with 150 fire events. I did not introduce discriminatory legislation. I introduced legislation that defined a firefighter as all types of firefighters. It is clearly the case that the Labor government discriminate and want to destroy small businesses.

In a few years time, when WorkCover realise that the changes that are made tonight will blow out the cost to workers compensation, we will have a debate here. Businesses will start complaining to their local members, and the Labor Party will come in here and concoct some story that somehow it had something to do with the LNP government from 2012-15, not recognising the fact that it had everything to do with what they are about to vote on tonight. Good luck to the Labor members when they go back to their communities tomorrow and talk to their businesses, particularly the member for Pine Rivers—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection. I talked about the postcard because the member for Pine Rivers said that all of the small businesses in her electorate love her. I have to say that even though we finished at 2 am last night I did not get any sleep because I was contemplating what sort of mind-boggling artwork I would have on the postcard I am going to send to that electorate. The member for Pine Rivers says that businesses love her so much, but do they know that tonight she voted to increase their workers compensation premiums by 20 per cent? Do they know that those opposite stopped the payroll tax threshold increase?

In terms of sticking up for small business, there is plenty of rhetoric out there from the Labor government but not much action. I know that they will go out into their electorates and spin it. They will say that it is not going to increase, but the CCIQ have confirmed it and we know it will. If I hear anything contradictory in terms of workers compensation from the QQIC or the Treasurer, I am pretty confident that I can bet on the CCIQ, which represents small businesses in this state. If small businesses are saying to the CCIQ that there are major problems with this legislation, it is flawed and it should be blocked in this parliament, I am going to place my bet on the CCIQ's and small businesses' understanding of what their issues are rather than the Labor government, because they certainly have form in this regard.

To my LNP colleagues, thank you very much for your support and contributions to the private member's bill here tonight. There is always a distinction between the Labor contribution and the LNP contribution: we do not owe union thugs and bosses anything and we do not have to come in here and pay lip-service to union bosses. We come in here and defend the rights of small business and workers in this state and we defend the rights of rural firefighters. Let the record show tonight that that is exactly how we will be voting.