




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 2 November 2016

MOTION

CFMEU, WorkCover Queensland

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumba—ALP) (6.18 pm): I rise to oppose this motion. Just when you thought they could not any sink any lower, along comes the member for Kawana. He is like a broken record launching yet another anti-union crusade, but this time it comes with a new twist. He wants to drag WorkCover into the mud—Queensland's very own workers' compensation scheme which is the best of its kind in Australia. WorkCover has the lowest average premiums of any Australian state or territory and provides outstanding coverage and benefits to injured Queensland workers. It should be beyond politics, but sadly the member for Kawana is willing to undermine confidence in WorkCover because of his own blind hatred for unions.

As I understand it, the appointment of the new WorkCover CEO is yet to be finalised. Clearly there is a process to be followed, and the Minister for Industrial Relations is following that process. Of course the industrial relations minister meets regularly with key stakeholders including business, employers and unions. These meetings are outlined in her diary extracts. They are all aboveboard and there is nothing to hide. Her meetings with the WorkCover CEO candidates were entirely appropriate. They were totally separate and unrelated to her meeting with the CFMEU state secretary. To suggest otherwise is simply not true, but the member for Kawana has never let the facts get in the way of a good story, nor has he ever been known for following due process. He presided over a spectacular series of ministerial bumbles during the sad period of the previous LNP government.

On behalf of all of us here, I put on the record our thanks for his handling of those issues. His botched handling of the Chief Justice appointment leaves him without a shred of credibility when it comes to matters like this. There were many other disastrous bumbles by the member for Kawana when he was Queensland's worst ever industrial relations minister and attorney-general. Let us look at some of the Bleijie bumbles.

I refer to the boot camp tenders. In April 2015 Queensland's Auditor-General raised concerns about favouritism and cost blowouts after examining the Newman government's youth boot camp program. The report tabled in parliament—

Mr MINNIKIN: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order relating to relevance. I ask that the member be brought back to the subject of the debate. I would like your ruling, please, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: I would urge the member to make his contribution relevant to the motion we are debating.

Mr WHITING: In his speech the member for Kawana accused us of political interference. The report tabled in parliament said that the Fraser Coast and Lincoln Springs boot camp providers were chosen even though suitable, lower cost options were available. It all happened on the member for Kawana's watch.

Certainly the member has accused someone on this side of the House of leaking information. I refer to the sorry fiasco brought about once again by the member for Kawana's loose lips, when the government was forced to settle a defamation case with a Gold Coast law firm over comments about—

Mr MINNIKIN: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I would urge you to rule again on relevance to the topic at hand.

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a further point of order. The member ought know that that matter is currently subject to a Crime and Corruption Commission investigation. Ministers have been subjected to that investigation. I would ask that the member tread very carefully in what he is about to say on that matter.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Murrumba, I would urge you to make your contribution relevant. I think you have strayed outside the subject of the motion we are debating. I ask you to come back to the topic we are debating, please.

Mr WHITING: This motion is another attempt by the member for Kawana to undermine a workers organisation that is crucial in protecting the lives of Queenslanders. The CFMEU protects Queenslanders who work on construction sites from injury or death. We need their vigilance because Queenslanders are dying on construction sites at an unacceptable rate. As I said earlier this year, there have been no fatalities on Queensland CFMEU sites since 2008 but there have been 74 deaths on non-unionised sites. In the seven years that the ABCC was around there were 255 deaths on Australian construction sites and 356 within the construction industry.

I oppose this motion because I think it is absolutely crucial that we reject what has been said and implied about interference in this process. All organisations and stakeholders—whether they be employers or unions—have a legitimate right to meet with and talk to ministers about a variety of issues.

In closing, we should not be listening to a man whom the former president of the Bar Association described as 'an inexperienced and undereducated and, in my view, incompetent Attorney-General' who headed 'insidious attacks' against the legal profession. That is why I believe that the motion should be opposed.

(Time expired)