




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning) (3.44 pm): I rise in the House today to support the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018. The Termination of Pregnancy Bill brings into sharp relief for all of us in this place that, along with the privilege of serving in this House, our deliberations are associated with great responsibility. It is in moments like this when reform is bound to emotion, when opinion is framed by ideals and when debate is linked to beliefs that we get the most unobstructed view of the character and value of this institution and those members who comprise it. Shorn of its partisan fervour and its adversarial temperament, it finally comes down to this: members of parliament are also citizens. They are subject and respondent to the laws they pass. They are people with their own experiences, their own values and their own consciences. Parliament is an expression of humanity governing itself—government of, by and for the people. More so than in most debates, today we are a parliament of the people.

This bill—because it is for so many so personal—must be considered with civility. Some will distinguish themselves in this debate by the respectful manner with which they engage those whose opinions they do not share. Not without diminished passion for the cause, not with less fervour or conviction, but in recognition that through a conscience vote in a representative democracy each member of the House comes to this debate on a course set by their own education, learning and life experience, their own moral compass, their own sense of what is right and wrong. Conscience, after all, means inner sight, and in matters of conscience individuals are ultimately answerable to themselves.

The Australian Labor Party has for many decades supported conscience votes on matters such as the bill before the House. Votes on the basis of conscience have been a defining and unifying principle of our party on great moral questions like those before the House today. The Premier has never wavered in her belief that matters such as those contained in this bill should be subject to a conscience vote for members of the state parliamentary Labor Party. This accords with our party's history, conference resolutions and rules. She has been strongly supported in this position of principle by the Deputy Premier, Jackie Trad.

I also want to commend Kate Jones, the member for Cooper and Minister for Innovation and Tourism Industry Development, for the thoughtful opinion piece she wrote published in the *Courier-Mail* on 4 September this year supporting the need for all members of this House to be able to exercise a free vote on this bill guided only by conscience. It is a privilege to serve in the cabinet with ministers and members of parliament of the calibre of the Premier, Deputy Premier, the Attorney-General, Yvette D'Ath, and Minister Jones. Their strong support for a conscience vote for our parliamentary party on great moral questions like those before the House and this bill speaks volumes about their own consciences and integrity.

I support this bill because I do not believe that terminations of pregnancy should be regulated under the provisions of the Criminal Code. I believe that women should be able to access safe, legal termination of pregnancy services. That is why in 2009 when I served as the Queensland

Attorney-General I introduced changes to the Criminal Code to ensure that medical professionals who provide medical terminations of pregnancy are afforded the same protections as medical professionals providing lawful surgical termination services. It was also why when I served as health minister in the first term of the Palaszczuk government I ensured that funding was provided to Marie Stopes International so that women in regional Queensland cities like Townsville and Rockhampton could continue to access termination services in their community and would not have to travel to Brisbane or, worse, other parts of Australia. I did those things without fanfare. I did so because I believed they were the right thing to do. I did so because they were the right thing to do for Queensland women. That is the Labor way: delivering genuine reform to improve the lives, health and rights of Queenslanders.

I do not believe that the sanction of the criminal law should hang above the heads of women who choose to terminate a pregnancy, for whom the experience is already in many cases painful, challenging and deeply personal. I believe it is a decision for women and doctors, not lawyers and judges. This week it is a decision for members of this House. We are reminded by this debate that what we do matters for many people, most of whom we will never meet, in real and profound ways. While we may come to the debate as products of our own experiences, the decisions we make this week will have enormous consequences for the experiences of others. We will each be guided by what we think is right, but that should at least be tempered by what we think is right for them.

Individual sovereignty, the capacity to decide for oneself, is a human right and is fundamental to the democratic tradition. If we want to hold individuals to account for their decisions, we must give them the freedom to decide. The right to choose, the liberty of personal action, is part of what it means to be human. No-one should arbitrate for a woman what is in her own deeply personal interests. A woman may be advised and a woman may be counselled but it is that woman who must decide, and that woman should not be prosecuted for it.

One woman who had a profound impact on me on my own journey was one of my constituents, Zena Mason. Zena travelled from her home in Woodridge all the way to Cairns to share her story with the members of the parliamentary committee examining this bill. This is no small effort for a mum with a beautiful young son and who works full-time. The decision Zena and her husband made to terminate the pregnancy of a long-wished-for child late in Zena's pregnancy still echoes in Zena's words and in her heart. It will no doubt echo for some time to come. Listening to Zena's story, which she told me in a quiet and respectful way after walking in the Queensland heat to my office pushing a stroller, reinforced for me the heartbreaking decision many women and their families have to make to bring pregnancy to an end and that their decision should not be further weighed down with the additional burden of possible criminal sanction.

I spoke earlier about the importance of civility in this debate. Freedom of speech and association, however, do not include freedom to intimidate and harass. I believe that the provisions of this bill that guarantee safety zones around clinics and protect the privacy of women seeking the services of those clinics and their family and supporters are a sensible, important and necessary step.

Because the law has a human dimension, it frames a moral purpose. It is a guidebook for civil society—even more important for the overwhelming majority of our community who follow the law's tenets than for the few who are inclined to breach them. The rule of law is humanity's most civilising accomplishment, which is why we should always ask when we are considering the Criminal Code just who it is we are seeking to punish. I do not believe in all conscience that young women, in fact any woman, making choices about their own bodies and lives should be numbered among them.

There are some participating in this debate who will be troubled by it. For some, matters of personal faith and deep belief make its subject matter problematic, but there is nevertheless something elevated in its prosecution—each member standing up for what they stand for, making their own contribution according to their own values, according to their own conscience, and in doing so expressing that most powerful evocation of the most fundamental right of a free society: 'This is what I believe.' I, for one, believe that the bill should be supported and commend it to the House.