




Speech By
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Record of Proceedings, 17 October 2018

TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (12.47 pm): I rise today to speak to the Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018. This is an extremely complex, personal and emotive issue for all Queenslanders, as are all matters concerning life or death. I would like to acknowledge the opinions of those on both sides of this debate. The LNP party room voted unanimously in favour of a conscience vote on this bill and it is with my conscience that I oppose Labor's extreme Termination of Pregnancy Bill. I strongly believe in the sanctity of human life and feel we should make every effort to protect that life, particularly when it comes to our most innocent and vulnerable. Queensland law has always allowed for an abortion when the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother. However, this same law has always been carefully balanced against the desire to uphold the sanctity of life of the unborn child. As described by Justice McGuire when he spoke of the common law tradition of sanctity of human life, he said—

The law in this State has not abdicated its responsibility as a guardian of the silent innocence of the unborn. It should rightly use its authority to see that abortion on whim or caprice does not insidiously filter into our society. There is no legal justification for abortion on demand.

Justice McGuire's words would resonate with many Queenslanders and I am sure they resonate with some members of this chamber. This legislation strips away the critical balance that we have always sought to achieve between protecting the sanctity of life of the unborn child and the health and wellbeing of the mother. Reasonable people might believe that, where a pregnancy has resulted from an act of criminal violence, the fate of the pregnancy should be solely the decision of the mother and that we as a society should do whatever we can to support the mother, whichever path she chooses. Reasonable people might also believe—as do I—that, where there is no criminal violence and no medical danger, it is our responsibility to not only support the mother but also protect the life of the unborn child. That is the balance that the Queensland law achieves right now and it is as close as we can get to justice on this fraught issue.

There is no balance in this legislation. Labor's extreme abortion bill will allow the termination of pregnancy for any reason, including gender selection, up to 22 weeks. Labor's Termination of Pregnancy Bill is more extreme than legislation in other western nations. We can look at very socially progressive countries such as Norway, Denmark, France or Belgium and find that even they do not have abortion laws as extreme as this bill. For all of those countries, and many others in the Western World, the cut-off for abortion on demand is 12 weeks, not Labor's 22 weeks.

In Germany, between 12 weeks and 22 weeks abortion is allowed only on the grounds of medical necessity, that is, to prevent danger to the mother's life or grave injury to her physical and mental health and if the danger cannot be reasonably averted another way. If Labor were proposing a law such as the law in Germany, France, Belgium, Norway, or Denmark, a reasonable person might accept it, but Labor is proposing only an extreme, take-it-or-leave-it, unlimited abortion up to 22 weeks and no meaningful restraints after 22 weeks.

Labor's Termination of Pregnancy Bill will allow for abortion for undefined social reasons, including gender selection, up to 22 weeks. Further, the absolute abhorrence of this bill is that, beyond

22 weeks and right up to birth, there are no serious enforceable restraints on abortion. This bill gives one doctor total power to decide whether a very late-term abortion is reasonable even on social grounds. There is no panel of specialists or ethics committee involved. Nobody can challenge the doctor's decision, even if it is a doctor with a commercial interest in the abortion. The doctor is meant to get another doctor's opinion but, if that step is not fulfilled, there is no penalty under this bill. This bill is wide open to abuse with no meaningful restraint on late-term abortions.

Another way to understand how extreme this legislation is is that, in Queensland, the birth of a baby after 20 weeks must officially be registered. If the baby is not born alive, a death certificate must be provided. If the birth of a premature baby at 20 weeks requires a birth and/or death certificate, why can someone stand here today and consciously vote in favour of legislation that will legalise abortion of an entirely healthy baby from an entirely healthy mother at 22 weeks?

I acknowledge that, in a happy situation, no woman chooses to seek an abortion. The decision to abort an unexpected or unplanned pregnancy is often heavily influenced by many external factors, including financial, psychological, social and physiological circumstances. In a civilised society, when a woman finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, it is our duty as fellow citizens and legislators to ensure that all reasonable measures are in place to support that person. However, this extreme Labor legislation is concerned only with procuring an abortion. It fails to provide a structure of support for women through counselling, pregnancy support services, a cooling-off period and other important safeguards that could make all the difference to women who feel that they have no choice other than to abort their pregnancy.

It has been claimed repeatedly that abortion is wholly and solely a health issue, but pregnancy is not a disease or an illness. Pregnancy is an opportunity for new life. Unless pregnancy threatens the health of the mother, I challenge the notion that abortion is solely a health issue.

I am gravely concerned that this bill fails to provide safeguards for doctors, nurses and support staff to conscientiously object to abortion. Clause 8 of this bill criminalises any doctor in Queensland who refuses to cooperate with a request for an abortion, even after 20 weeks, even when there is no medical justification for abortion, even for sex selection. I believe that any change to the abortion law in Queensland must fundamentally protect the beliefs and values of doctors, medical staff, cleaners, nurses and administrators who cannot in sincere conscience participate in such a procedure.

I cannot stand here and support a bill that is as open to abuse as this one, that offers no structure of support to the mother, no protection for the life of the unborn child and no respect for the conscience of doctors and nurses. I add that the AMA's decision to endorse this extreme Labor bill can be regarded only as abandoning the welfare of the not born yet. It is very disappointing that the AMA made that decision without surveying its members.

I ask everybody in this chamber to look to their conscience and ask themselves seriously: is this is best we can do? Will this legislation stand the test of time—or have we just wasted a lot of time in this chamber on debating something that does not walk a sensible path that the people of Queensland can respect, that does not provide the protections and the safeguards that we know people need? We can do a much better job than this legislation. I think the people of Queensland deserve much better than this legislation. This legislation is extreme, it is unjust and I oppose it.