




Speech By
Michael Healy

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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HOLIDAYS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEALY** (Cairns—ALP) (5.22 pm): I rise to speak obviously in support of the bill. I am pleased that there are no children in the chamber to see some of the immature activities taking place.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr HEALY: You will not learn anything when you are talking. I appreciate that there are significant philosophical differences here, but the capacity to get the message across without attacking one another is seriously disappointing.

On 4 August 2019 the Premier and Minister for Trade and the Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations announced that the Queensland government would consult with stakeholders on a proposal to declare a part-day public holiday on Christmas Eve. On 19 September 2019 the Hon. Grace Grace introduced the Holidays and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019 into the Queensland parliament. The bill was referred to the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee, of which I am very proud to be a member, for detailed consideration.

The objective of the bill is to provide for Christmas Eve to be observed as a part-day public holiday from 6 pm to 12 midnight. We are not talking about the world changing; it is six hours. Declaring a public holiday will recognise the personal, social, religious and cultural significance of Christmas celebrations that commence on Christmas Eve, and so recognise the importance of that evening for people to spend time with family and friends and prepare for Christmas Day. Declaring a public holiday from 6 pm will also ensure that workers have the right to reasonably refuse to work or be fairly compensated should they work after 6 pm on Christmas Eve.

The bill will achieve its objective by amending the Holidays Act 1983 and making other consequential legislative amendments to provide for Christmas Eve—24 December—to be observed as a part-day public holiday, from 6 pm. The policy objective of the amendment is to enliven industrial relations rights and protections for workers. This means that workers are entitled to refuse to work in reasonable circumstances or to the payment of public holiday penalty rates where work is performed on Christmas Eve after 6 pm. It is not intended that the amendment displace or otherwise impact on Christmas Eve being a business day or for any other purpose, so the amendment applies only for working out a person's entitlements under certain prescribed acts or industrial instruments within the meaning of those acts.

As we have heard and has been said, a total of 1,779 submissions were received and 1,271 submissions, or 71.4 per cent, were in support of the proposals. Some 508 submissions, or 28.6 per cent, opposed the proposal. I acknowledge the concerns raised by some of the parties. I have spoken to a number of retailers in Cairns in relation to their concerns. I explained that the beautiful city of Cairns receives over 2.8 million visitors from around Australia and the world annually and that, if they want, they have the right to increase their prices by way of a 15 per cent surcharge. Most people are used to paying a public holiday surcharge. It happens currently and is pretty well expected. I am confident that most people would be aware of the additional charges over holiday periods, as the majority of people in this chamber would be.

I take the liberty to highlight a few other issues that I think are significant to the debate. Sixty-four per cent of our national economy is based on household spending. That means take-home pay and disposable income. Under the Morrison federal government, we are experiencing the lowest wage growth over the past six years. Any economist will tell you that telltale retail markers on the productivity of an economy are new car sales and the sale of whitegoods. They are both down—significantly and consistently. We have seen the Morrison government introduce cuts to fast-food, hospitality, retail and pharmacy employees, reducing the take-home pay of hundreds of thousands of workers. While all of this is happening, these great economic managers have managed to double our national debt!

There are significant contributing factors to the erosion of wages, take-home pay and workers' rights. The simple facts are in front of us. All of these hardworking people contribute to the foundations of our banking system. They are the strongest deterrent to social upheaval. Ensuring their wages are protected, ensuring a better take-home pay packet and protecting their rights in light of the onslaught by this federal government is fair and just, and it is what we are doing. For those who do not get it—I suspect there might be quite a few—we are building the consumers of tomorrow. This is how you build economies—not by creating vast economic and social disparity but by providing economic opportunities and securing people with a basic wage.

These proposed provisions have been in place in South Australia since 2012 and the Northern Territory since 2016. They observe Christmas Eve as a part-day public holiday from 7 pm to 12 midnight. Both also observe a similar public holiday on New Year's Eve.

From what I understand, the sky has not yet fallen in in these areas. Businesses are still operating, things are still going well and, as I said, the world has not collapsed. Before I thank the chair and some of those in the executive committee, I want to touch on the fact that we need to ensure that as we move forward we create an environment where everybody can get a basic wage, where everybody can earn a wage. This is not about creating disparity; this is about providing opportunity. These people need to be looked after. We need to recognise that this is a special time. We do it in a range of other areas. Why is their contribution any different to anybody else? Some of the statements and comments made here have been impressively disappointing. All we are trying to do is help people and thinking that we are attacking workers is absolutely ridiculous. When I was working I never, ever saw a payroll tax cut by an LNP government, but I have seen 112 businesses in Cairns be the beneficiaries of payroll tax changes, so to even make—

Debate, on motion of Mr Healy, adjourned.