




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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PUBLIC SERVICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.11 pm), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions, regardless of how repetitive the contributions of members opposite were. I think a script made the rounds and the same points were made again and again. I thank them for their contributions to the debate. It is interesting that free thinking is certainly not important to those opposite.

I reinforce that the Palaszczuk government is committed to maximising job security for our public servants. I thank Peter Bridgman for his report. Those opposite referred to the delay in bringing this bill to the House. We brought this bill to the House in July. Since early this year we have been dealing with this little thing called a world health pandemic. Often I wonder what rock those opposite have been under. They talk about various things as if the pandemic is not happening here in Queensland. What about the remarkable way our Premier has handled it? In spite of all that, in July the Premier was able to introduce a bill regarding public servant job security—an absolutely unbelievable effort. Those opposite still complain about the time line of this bill. It is absolutely unbelievable that members opposite get up time and time again and repeat the same rubbish.

Unlike those opposite, we very much value our public servants in this state. We do not cut, sack and sell. This bill is about ensuring that does not happen again. This bill is about making sure that our public servants do not again hear guarantees that they have nothing to fear only to find, with a different incoming government, that 14,000 of them have lost their jobs. Members opposite should be ashamed of themselves for that disgusting history in Queensland.

This all started with the sacking of nurses in Townsville. Members opposite come in here crying crocodile tears about how much they care about public servants. The Premier has said it before: actions speak louder than words. Those crocodile tears and those words about how much they care for our hardworking public servants are not fooling anybody. They know exactly what they did. They will never forget. We will continue to remind them about their policies. They said that public servants had nothing to fear—starting with nurses in Townsville—and they sacked 14,000 of them.

Members opposite come in here with stories about public servants. I do not even know if half of the stories are true. I am sure they are made up. Every time we investigate something that is raised by those opposite, we find that it is exaggerated or incorrect. I have no doubt that what they raise here today is exactly the same.

Mr WATTS: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. I do not see this in the long title of the bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Thank you for your guidance, member for Toowoomba North. I ask the member for McConnel to resume her speech.

Ms GRACE: I am actually responding to the issues raised by those opposite on which they asked me to comment. When it comes to the protection of the Public Service, we know that there is only one side of politics that those public servants can rely on—that is, a Palaszczuk Labor government.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Ms GRACE: I take the interjection of the member for Kawana. That is the wrong answer. That is not the answer that we get when we are out there in the real world.

The issues of accountability, decisions, appeals and disciplinary matters were raised time and time again in repeated speeches. This bill aims to address those issues. We want to put these measures in a professional jurisdiction under the Queensland Industrial Relations Act—I think that will be a big step forward—rather than in the Public Service Act. I know that we have the support of all stakeholders on that. It might seem like a very small thing, but it is a big step towards ensuring though those decisions are published. We will get decisions on appeals and can read them. Then they can be applied and, hopefully, we will get transparency, consistency and an ability to look at these things a lot sooner. We think this object of the bill will make a big difference.

A lot of questions were asked in relation to the special commissioner—what it will cost, what it will do and why we will have another bureaucrat. Once again, their words reveal their intention. There is not one public servant those opposite do not want to sack. This person is not even employed and already they want to sack them! The only people those opposite do not want to sack are themselves and those working for Clive Palmer. They would like to see a Palmer-Frecklington government in place, as many of them said. This is what we will get if the LNP is elected. Lord help us if it is.

The legislation is clear about the special commissioner's role. It is about gender equity. It is about a number of issues to do with promoting a diverse workforce. That is very important in the public sector. It is about promoting effective and efficient government. There is someone who will be responsible for doing this. It is a recommendation of the Bridgman report that we certainly support. All members opposite can ask is, 'How much can we save when we come in and sack that person?' They are already doing it.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Ms GRACE: I take the interjection of the member for Kawana. The special commissioner will give special advice to drive improvements. We support that recommendation. We believe that, when it comes to gender equity, workforce diversity, efficiency and promoting an effective and efficient government services, it is an important role.

We have a Public Service that has been required to step up during COVID-19 in a number of ways, and it has stepped up. We have a gold star when it comes to contact tracing, when it comes to what we have done in health, when it comes to how we have managed our borders and when it comes to how we have managed education in this state. It was absolutely wonderful to see an effective and efficient Public Service, but we want to continue that progress. We think that a special commissioner who can provide that advice and generate gender equity is definitely a step in the right direction.

When it comes to health and safety entry permits, this is hilarious. We have a government that cannot control the CFMMEU federally under federal law and the member for Kawana wants me as a state industrial relations minister—who has no jurisdiction, I might add—to somehow control a union that is operating under federal laws. Thank goodness he is no longer the industrial relations minister! Time and time again in my speech I said that the changes to the health and safety right of entry have to be permit holders. Permit holders come under the federal jurisdiction. It is recognised under the state jurisdiction, and that is what the amendment clearly says.

If something is happening under federal law I have no jurisdiction, yet somehow the state industrial relations minister needs to correct what the Liberal Scott Morrison government is doing nothing about federally. If it were not so serious, it would be laughable! It is laughable because earlier today the member for Kawana was wrong about the transfer of the IR powers. He keeps harping on about it, but he does not understand the use of the corporations power and what happened then.

Let me get back to the bill before the House because if I continue to correct the errors of the member for Kawana I will be here all night and we will never finish because those errors are laughable and show an absolute appalling understanding of a portfolio that he once held—an absolutely appalling understanding—and he should be ashamed. He should hang his head in shame given some of the things that are said by those opposite and then repeated time and time again when the sheet goes around to everyone to deliver their speeches. It is absolutely unbelievable.

As I noted earlier today, the Palaszczuk government is committed to continuously improving the Queensland public sector—committed—and the way it delivers services to meet the needs of Queenslanders, and it has done an outstanding job particularly during COVID-19. That is why the Public

Service and Other Legislation Amendment Bill seeks to progress the priority stage 1 public sector management reforms arising from recommendations of the Bridgman review, and the Premier has them ready in this House to be debated despite the unbelievable world health pandemic that we are facing. That is absolutely commendable on the part of our Premier—amazing! It will also ensure the Queensland Public Service is a fair employer that is best positioned to be responsive to the community and meet the needs of the government.

The recommendations of the Bridgman review and the contents of this bill will be subject to extensive consultation with Queensland government agencies and public sector unions through meetings and joint advisory committees. The amendments to be moved will make it fairer and correct a couple of anomalies. We look forward to supporting stage 2. Even though the Premier is heavy with thought with regard to COVID-19 and the world health pandemic, I know that she will give public servants the due consideration that they deserve despite the workload in relation to the pandemic. I commend the bill to the House.