




Speech By
Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Record of Proceedings, 26 November 2020

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Declared Urgent

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (3.10 pm): I oppose this urgency motion—not the content, because we will not get into a debate of the content. Mr Deputy Speaker Kelly, I congratulate you on your appointment as Deputy Speaker. In her introductory speech to this bill the Attorney-General mentioned local government. It is the hospital pass. I could not help but see her smile, because the Attorney-General drew the short straw in terms of the bill to which this local government amendment would be tacked onto. It is a lucky day for the next minister to introduce a bill, because he does not have to tackle this local government amendment.

The amendment is included in the COVID bill, which is an important bill that should have appropriate scrutiny because it deals with restrictions on people's lives and businesses. That bill will not go through the appropriate committee process. We will not debate sessional orders until next week, so who knows what we will be doing? This amendment will mean in effect that the government, in a history of three years, is picking and choosing which mayors it wants and does not want. What is even more bizarre—this is the reason the bill should not be declared urgent and should go to a committee for proper assessment—is that I just heard the Attorney-General say that the Rockhampton issue will go to a by-election—I cannot even recall the fella's name; I have only seen him referred to in the paper as 'Pineapple'—but in Townsville it will be up to council to decide whether a by-election is held or the councillors will choose. Are we effectively saying with this amendment that in Rockhampton the councillors will not choose—there will be a by-election—but in Townsville the councillors will choose?

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I believe that the Manager of Opposition Business is now debating the substance of the bill as opposed to the urgency motion before us.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): I will take some advice. Can we confine the debate to the urgency motion in relation to the bill.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am concerned about the contents of the bill. That is why it should not be declared urgent. This government has form with respect to bills being declared urgent and not being referred to committees. We ended the 56th Parliament having a debate about the government withdrawing a bill that it had introduced, and we are starting the 57th Parliament with the introduction of legislation that basically repeals legislation that was just debated in the previous parliament.

It is very good to know that the Attorney-General says that the Local Government Association of Queensland supports the amendment, because it came up with the amendment in the first place—in the original bill, in the first committee process, when everyone warned the government about how dangerous this proposal was. Here we go again: we are now rushing the legislation. We have a committee system in this parliament. Committees have to do their job. When given the opportunity the

committees do their job. Whether government listens to committees is another thing, but when the committees work effectively we do not have these issues and we do not have to waste parliament's time with motions to declare bills urgent.

The COVID provisions are time sensitive. I get that. The provisions expire at the end of the year. The government is introducing regulations so we do not have to keep extending the bill. That debate will happen at another time. As COVID has been the biggest issue in Queensland since February or March this year, there should be extra scrutiny of relevant bills, particularly when they deal with people's lives and restrict what people can and cannot do in their family home, in public or in business. Parliament applies appropriate scrutiny by sending bills to one of the committees that is chosen to look at these particular matters.

It is concerning when the government of the day starts picking and choosing whether or not by-elections are held in particular council areas. There should be one rule for all council areas in Queensland. That needs scrutiny and needs to go through a proper parliamentary process. I do not accept the Attorney-General's view that the Local Government Association says this is okay. I am not sure of that; I have not seen the evidence. But guess what? The committee could, because the committee could call the Local Government Association of Queensland as a witness and it could tell everyone publicly how it feels about these amendments.

Without getting into the merits or otherwise of a particular individual who received 30 per cent of the vote and is waiting to be sworn in as mayor of Rockhampton, proper process should be followed. As I understand it, he is to be inducted as the mayor of Rockhampton based on laws that this parliament passed. Whether the government likes it or not, that is the law. If the government wants to change it, due to its seriousness, it should go through a proper process.

Who is to say that in the future there will not be more amendments dealt with urgently? What if the government does not like the mayor of, say, the Sunshine Coast council and wants to abolish or change the position? I am not commenting one way or another in terms of my local mayor, Mark Jamieson. Members ought not to draw conclusions about my use of that particular set of circumstances, even though we have had our differences. This is serious. Quite frankly, these amendments should be in a bill in their own right. The COVID bill is important. The regulations attached to the COVID bill and the extension of extraordinary powers to the Chief Health Officer should be in a separate bill.

We need to take seriously the amendments that deal with what at this point in time is a duly elected official for a particular role under a law passed by the current government in the previous parliament. I will not cop coming back next week, budget week. The budget will be handed down on Tuesday, so I suspect we will have to debate this bill on Wednesday or Thursday before the opposition leader gives his speech in reply to the budget. That is less than a week. That is a record even for the Labor government—rushed through in less than a week with no committee scrutiny.

Next week, not only will honourable members be dealing with a budget and \$104 billion or \$106 billion of debt; they will also be debating legislation, in the middle of budget week, that has been rushed through without any proper committee process. Because we will not have had the committee process, who is to say that we will not be back here in six months to deal with the unintended consequences of rushing things? That is the problem with rushing bills through. I spoke about that for the last three years when the government kept rushing bills through. I was proved correct every single time, because we would be back here—like we are today—with ministers, having drawn the short straw, begrudgingly moving amendments and taking the Deputy Premier's hospital pass. The Deputy Premier did not want to move the local government amendments so he handballed it to the Attorney-General and said, 'Have this. We need you to fix that.'

The problem is that we will have to keep coming back here unless there is proper scrutiny of these serious issues. We are basically getting rid of legislation that has already been through this parliament and been through a committee process. Someone elected in second place is about to take up a mayoralty and the government is tearing that up. That may be the right thing to do, but let us have proper debate and work it out without the rushed process.