




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (EXTENSION OF EXPIRING PROVISIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (2.50 pm): I am proud to rise in support of the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Bill 2020. I was privileged to give this bill particular attention in my role as a member of the Health and Environment Committee, and I thank the chair and my fellow committee members. However, it is interesting to give my contribution after that of my colleague the member for Mirani, whose contributions have been interesting, to say the least. In particular, I reflect with some irony on the bandying about of the right to life in a manner that I am yet to hear up until this time from more conservative members of this chamber. It seems that the right to life is suddenly of extraordinary importance when it comes to people's ability to go to the pub, yet I struggle to put that into context with some of the behaviour I saw during the recent election campaign.

I also note with interest that Queensland's economic response following on from the economic recovery plan that the Palaszczuk Labor government is rolling out has been exemplary and the seemingly disastrous impacts that have been referred to by the member for Mirani are not coming to pass and have not been indicated by anything we have seen before this chamber or anywhere else, so I look with interest to see in what fever dreams those imaginings will play out.

It has been nearly 400 days since the first case of COVID-19 was diagnosed and announced in Queensland, and it is true that in that time our world has changed in ways we could hardly have imagined. Not for over 100 years have we faced such an overwhelming global threat. Since that day in January 2020, the world has seen 111 million cases and nearly 2.5 million deaths. At this very moment over 92,000 people are known to be in a serious or critical condition suffering from COVID-19. By comparison over that period, Queensland has had only 1,323 cases, with most of those contracted overseas and detected in our world-leading hotel quarantine system which other jurisdictions internationally are now attempting to copy. None of this distracts from the tragedy that six Queenslanders have lost their lives.

My electorate of Pumicestone has seen our share of this crisis. With a median age more than a dozen years above the average, Pumicestone is the oldest state electorate in Queensland. Pumicestone residents also experience more than their share of chronic health conditions and disability, and this means that people in Pumicestone have good reason to fear the impacts of COVID-19. Early in 2020 the Palaszczuk government took swift action in this place to create a framework for our response. We passed laws to urgently amend the Public Health Act and various other pieces of legislation but, given the urgency of that response and the wideranging and serious nature of the measures taken, appropriately short sunset periods were included to ensure Queenslanders could have confidence that those measures would continue only as long as was necessary to address the COVID-19 threat.

Those measures are the essential tools in our Palaszczuk government's toolkit that have worked so well to contain COVID-19 and now we in this place need to ensure that those tools remain available while the risk to Queenslanders continues. These tools include the powers of our Chief Health Officer,

Dr Jeannette Young, to activate the complex machine that has worked so effectively to keep Queenslanders safe. Many members in this place have today received a briefing from Dr Young on the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, our next phase of Queensland's health response. Her strength and knowledge shine through. There is no better respected state Chief Health Officer anywhere in Australia, and no wonder: this is the fifth pandemic Dr Young has managed in her role as Queensland's Chief Health Officer. Her reassuring presence on our TV screens and her careful explanations have given us confidence and her advice has kept us safe and protected our economy.

I again turn to the comments of my colleague the member for Mirani. In the time since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Queensland, our Chief Health Officer has attended upwards of 200 media conferences where she has taken question upon question about the measures taken and the scientific basis for those measures. I hardly think that the member for Mirani is correct in his assertion that somehow the people of Queensland have been deprived of appropriate information or scientific decision-making underlying the restrictions and other measures taken.

As Queenslanders we owe Dr Young a huge vote of thanks, but Dr Young could not have taken those actions without the legislative framework created by our Palaszczuk Labor government. That framework was the basis for our health response and our health response has led the world, has protected our economy and is now allowing us to begin to build back better and grow Queensland jobs with our \$56 billion reconstruction plan over the next four years—and all this at a time when other developed nations remain in crisis. None of this would be possible without our strong and world-leading health response.

Worldwide cases continue to grow and hospital systems are overwhelmed. The global health toll is appalling. It is not only the 2.5 million who have lost their lives to COVID-19 who must be counted in that toll. Across developed nations where COVID-19 has not been controlled successfully, right now whole populations are missing routine screening appointments. People are afraid to seek essential health care. We cannot yet predict what the secondary health toll will be worldwide—we may never know—but we do know that here in Queensland not only has our COVID health response been exemplary but our routine health care has continued. Where it was disrupted during the height of the restrictions, it is now catching up.

I am deeply proud of what our Palaszczuk government achieved in the management of this global pandemic and I know that people in my electorate of Pumicestone are proud. I know because they tell me every single day and they do not want to see their hard work go to waste and they do not want to see the government's response picked to pieces by those opposite. The legislation before the House today provides the government with the tools to make sure that their hard work and the hard work of people like them right across Queensland is not wasted. That is what we owe to Pumicestone's vulnerable older people and the aged-care workers who take care of them. It is what we owe to the frontline workers who drove trucks and staffed local supermarkets through the height of the pandemic. We owe it to the teachers who supported Pumicestone kids through home learning and kids like them right across Queensland. It is also what we owe to our local healthcare workers.

Heartbreakingly, the dedicated staff at Caboolture Hospital cared for one of the six Queenslanders to have lost their battle with COVID-19. I can only begin to imagine how that was for those doctors, nurses and allied health workers. Where there have been strains though, our community has also shown strength. People in Pumicestone have stepped up over the last year and supported each other like never before. The Care Army has been out in force and unofficial care networks have driven people to appointments, dropped off groceries, walked pets and provided social contact for those in isolation. All of this work of the Pumicestone community and communities like it right across Queensland cannot be allowed to go to waste. Every Queenslander has done their bit to keep our state safe. They have protected our economy and set us up to build back better with more infrastructure, new manufacturing and the jobs of the future.

As much as we are already returning to a new normal, we know that the COVID-19 crisis is not over yet. With the vaccine rollout now just beginning, now is not the time for complacency. Here in Queensland we have a long history of dealing resiliently with natural disasters. Cyclones, floods and fires are crises our communities see all too often, but COVID-19 is not like a cyclone. We cannot just look out the window, see that the risk has passed and safely begin to rebuild.

COVID-19 is more like a tiger hiding in the grass that could spring an attack without warning. The risk is not over. In fact, with the emergence of new and more transmissible variants in circulation around the world the threat is more real than ever. This bill ensures that the Palaszczuk government has the tools we need to continue to manage this risk, to continue to protect the health of Queenslanders, to continue to support our economic recovery, to build back better and to support more jobs for Queenslanders as we emerge from this global pandemic. This bill is essential to that endeavour. I commend the bill to the House.