




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (4.05 pm): I rise to speak in favour of the bill before us. I start by paying regard to my local community that worked together to counter this pandemic, which I recognise is ongoing. My community listened, they took action and they stuck to the directions. Many people grumbled and many people complained. A few people complained vociferously. Even though it was difficult, in the main they did it. They stuck with what we asked them to do. I thank those who are vaccinated. They are part of four billion people, I do believe, around the world who are vaccinated. We still have the rest of the world to vaccinate though.

I pay regard to Queensland overall. It is very clear that we did well compared to our jurisdictions. When people asked me questions or raised objections about this before the Omicron outbreak, I would hold up seven fingers and say that seven deaths is all the deaths we have had. That was the number until that point. I was proud of that. I know that now in Queensland we have had over 700 deaths. My heart aches for all of those people and their families for their loss.

I pay regard to what Queensland has done. By and large, we stuck to the restrictions. We did what we were meant to do. That gave us the time and space to roll out vaccinations and make sure we had the best protection possible. Let us not forget that in terms of lockdowns Victoria was in lockdown for 260 days and we were in lockdown for 21 days. Most of that was just in the south-east corner. That is an incredible achievement and a metric that reflects how well we managed the pandemic.

I also pay regard to the Queenslanders who went to the Queensland Health website for information on COVID-19. As we know, there was—and still is—an enormous amount of misinformation and unreliable information being spread around. When people ask me questions I say to them, 'What have you seen on the Queensland website? It is cutting edge. That is where you will get your information.' One mother was despairing about her daughter who was heavily pregnant and refusing to get a vaccine. I was able to point to the part on the Queensland Health website that said that it is absolutely crucial for pregnant women to get vaccinated. That is one example of how we should all be promoting the Queensland Health website as the point of truth for Queenslanders in this pandemic.

For all those people who belittle the scientific evidence and medical scenarios around the pandemic and cast doubts on why we need these powers, I will quote some statistics. There are over six million people around the world, or probably double that, who have passed away because of COVID-19. Some 180,000 nurses, doctors and allied workers have passed away from COVID-19 as of November last year. That is an incredible number. I thank the member for Greenslopes for that information. There have been 6,000 deaths in Australia. In Queensland, as of yesterday, we have had 727 deaths.

We cannot ask all of the people if they want to be free. We cannot ask them: 'What choice do you want to make?' We cannot ask them: 'Do you want to see that health advice on the website?' We cannot ask them anymore. I say to people who cast doubts on why we need these powers, what choice

was exercised by those 180,000 nurses and doctors? What choice did they make? Their choice was to perform their duty, to run towards the fire, if you like. I pay tribute to those who have chosen to serve and do what they had to because of their duty. That is a choice that has made us all safer.

To all those people who have emailed me—I know all members here have been emailed excessively about this particular bill—I say to them: I will vote for it and I will not be swayed. I am determined to record my vote for this particular bill. I will listen to health advice, I will listen to the lessons of history and I will listen to my own convictions when I vote for this bill. One person said—and I am sure we all received the same email—

Grow a backbone. Grow a conscience. Start standing up and doing your job to protect the people you are meant to represent.

My message is: thank you. I am doing exactly that. I am firmly convinced that this bill and these measures are what we need to keep Queenslanders safe into the future. There are a number of reasons for that. I have said that there are the lessons of history and my own convictions. I outline one of the reasons I feel so strongly in favour of vaccines and these health measures. I have talked about this before.

My grandfather was crippled by polio. He could not serve in World War II because of that. He walked with a limp all his life. My mother had rubella, German measles, when she was quite young. That badly affected her sight. Her sight was never the same after that. She spent months in bed because of that. I saw my own sister with the worst case of chicken pox I have ever seen. She was absolutely riddled with it. She also had whooping cough. I still remember her whooping cough echoing through the household. These are all diseases that we can now vaccinate against. Those members of my family would not have suffered if they had those vaccinations. We should always be standing up for vaccinations.

I also remember the case of James Chapple. He died on a sailing boat here in the 19th century. His wife and daughter survived. He is commemorated on a plaque at Dunwich on Stradbroke Island. His granddaughter I think was Elsie Flay, who was my great-grandmother. We think he died from typhoid. It is a reminder that we have constantly had diseases for which we need to take such measures.

On the issue of convictions—I am talking about our own personal convictions—I think it is fair to say that for two years we have seen the LNP being lukewarm or cool on these COVID measures. We remember they called 64 times for the border to be opened. The member for Kawana said yesterday that he believed in ‘small government’ and ‘personal responsibility’. I believe in active government, a government that intervenes to help our people, a government that offers a way forward, a government that gathers resources and applies solutions to problems. That is an active government.

I also believe in personal responsibility, as we all do on this side, but the ultimate personal responsibility is to be part of a collective response, to be part of a collaborative action to protect each other, to perhaps dilute our self-interest to enlarge the interest and wellbeing of all of us. That is the ultimate personal responsibility. That embodies what this bill is about.

I will remind people who are listening what this bill is about. It is about enabling the power of the CHO, the Chief Health Officer. It will make sure that workers in vulnerable settings like aged care and disability services are vaccinated, and it will make sure that people with COVID go into isolation or quarantine. That is what this bill does. They are crucial measures to help us all get through this pandemic.

One of the things I worry about, in listening to the LNP yesterday and today, is what they choose to believe in. If they do not believe in mandates—and we heard that yesterday—I think that shows a chilling indifference to the public health and safety of Queenslanders. I urge them to consider whether they stand to oppose mandates or not.

There is no doubt that this bill has the best interests of Queenslanders at heart. It really is the embodiment of all that we have learnt and done over many years, especially the last two years, placing health advice at the centre of our response and making sure that we are guided by this—not ill-considered ideologies, not ill-considered lurches to try to gain political advantage. We need this bill to make sure that Queenslanders stay safe. I commend this bill to the House.