




Speech By
Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2022

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

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (2.20 pm): I also rise to make a short contribution to the bill. I want to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Greenslopes. I wholeheartedly endorse his opening comments. I too put on the record my heartfelt thanks to our first responders, including those in the health system, the police, the ambos and the teachers. At the start of this pandemic they all stood up and have continued to do so over the past two years. Certainly I echo his comments there. I acknowledge the Queenslanders and the many people from around the world who have lost their lives to COVID. I acknowledge them and their families. I also acknowledge the people from my electorate and from across Queensland and Australia who have lost their livelihoods.

In further response to some of the comments by the member for Greenslopes, first I put on the record that I am an avid supporter of vaccinations, particularly the miracle of the mRNA vaccinations. However, more and more I am becoming an avid opponent of the ongoing mandates. There are a couple of reasons for that. Just over two years ago now we were asked to make sacrifices, which we all dutifully did. This government, with the support of the opposition, put in place what at the time were draconian measures that were required to keep us all safe. As the member for Greenslopes pointed out, some of those measures did work.

We were asked to make those sacrifices two years ago for two reasons. One, we needed to slow the spread of the virus so that the world could have time to create a vaccine, and it really has been a miracle that that was done in such a short amount of time. The second reason we were asked to make those sacrifices was to flatten the curve so that our local health services could have the time to build capacity. Throughout the world, our scientists, medical experts, immunologists, virologists, epidemiologists and others did their job. Queenslanders and people across Australia also did their job. People lost their livelihoods. People made serious sacrifices. People abided dutifully by the legislation of the time and made those sacrifices. However, this government did not uphold its end of the deal to increase capacity.

I heard the member for Greenslopes and other members talk about the evidence. What we have been calling for, what we have been begging for and what all Queenslanders have been asking for is the evidence. What we want and what we demand is facts over fear. We want facts over fear. I am very concerned that the 10 per cent of people who are not vaccinated, in the vacuum of any credible information from the government, go looking for their own information. That is why I, and I am sure all members of parliament, have been hammered by anti-vaxxers who have gone down a rabbit hole with ivermectin or hydroxychloroquine when there is no research to support that they are effective. In the absence of data to underpin this legislation, people go looking for that. We were told that we needed to dutifully abide by these mandates and regulations until we reached a vaccination rate of 90 per cent, and we are there now.

Leading up to this debate I went looking for some evidence. I am lucky that my brother is an associate professor of epidemiology in the United States and he pointed me to some facts. I disagree with the member for Greenslopes when he spoke about how devastating it would be if this legislation

were not passed. We know that two years ago, when we supported these measures—and a lot of them did work—that we were dealing with a different beast. We were dealing with Delta, Beta and Alpha before that. Now we are dealing with Omicron and it is a totally different beast. We are saying that this legislation and the powers that we are giving to this government as legislators in this place need to be proportionate to the risk.

I disagree with the member for Greenslopes because there is clear evidence that over 50 per cent of people in Europe and over 25 per cent of Americans have seen Omicron. We know that in stark contrast to Delta, Beta and Alpha before that, the current death rate of Omicron is 0.00003. Thankfully, due to the miracle vaccines that I have spoken about, if you have been vaccinated and you get Omicron there is a 90 per cent chance that you will not suffer severe illness or die. Therefore, this legislation needs to be proportionate to what we are dealing with. From across the globe there is clear and readily accepted evidence from epidemiologists and others to show that the measures we are taking now are essentially overreach because the situation we faced two years ago is different to what we face now. Things have moved on.

I agree with the member for Greenslopes when he talked about other variants. There will be other variants as there are with the Spanish flu and the Russian flu before that. Variants from those two pandemics still travel around the world regularly. There will be other variants, but history and evolution show that over time as humans we will develop more natural immunity, on top of the 90 per cent vaccination rate. Therefore, we will not require an indefinite extension—particularly for six months—of these draconian measures. That is why we on this side of the House will be moving amendments to support an extension of three months. We will be back in this place for two weeks in May. If, heaven forbid, after May there is a variant as or more serious than Delta, we will be in a position to rapidly reconvene parliament. We on this side of the House support that.

I want to put on the record that I do not necessarily agree that getting vaccinated is a personal choice. I ran for the LNP and a centre right government because on this side of the House we believe in limited government and maximum personal freedoms. While I do not necessarily agree with the 10 per cent of people who do not want to get vaccinated, that is up to them. If they want to get sick with COVID, that is up to them. However, I think you have a civic duty to get vaccinated. I know of one case in America where two people refused to get vaccinated and died from a previous strain of COVID, leaving their children orphaned. I believe it is incumbent upon people to get vaccinated if they can. However, in Queensland among that 10 per cent there are people who do not want to get vaccinated for reasons other than being anti-vaxxers. I say that they should not continue to be punished.

Earlier I spoke in acknowledgment of our frontline services. It is unfortunate that earlier this year they had to deal with a more than one-in-100-year flood event. Our frontline services are also dealing with reduced capacity because of the mandate. There are hundreds of police affected. We know hundreds of ambos and others are affected. They have a reduced capacity to deal with disasters. Having more mandates or continued mandates to put downward pressure on systems like this is counterproductive because the mandates are causing downward pressure on our frontline services.

I have spoken about how revolutionary and successful the vaccinations have been and how Omicron is a minor virus. We now know that it is probably less severe than the seasonal flu. Two years ago, no-one in our hospitals and governments really knew what we were going to have to deal with as the wave of coronavirus came into the country. However, now our ICU staff and other health staff, medical professionals, immunologists and virologists know a lot more. In hospitals, the treatment for people with COVID has improved out of sight. They are now using new therapeutics and repurposed drugs. Not only is vaccination potentially saving their lives; our health staff are better at dealing with the virus.

In summing up, we in this place need to ensure that the harsh measures and the strong legislation we are putting over people that have adverse effects on them are proportionate with the risks we face. Clearly, across the globe and across this country, with what we are dealing with now in the current Omicron wave the systems and the legislation we put in place two years ago to deal with other more serious strains of the virus are no longer necessary.

In summary, how will we be judged in the future when we look back? Assuming that COVID will have other waves, that it will come back and that over time—hopefully—it reduces to become less and less severe, how will we in this place be judged for the way we treated people who for whatever reason chose not to get vaccinated?