



Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (11.38 am), continuing: I resume this debate. I think I ended yesterday by saying that we thanked Queenslanders for their role in their remarkable effort in keeping Queensland safe, particularly at the height of Delta and the other variants that we had when we first became aware of this terrible world health pandemic. We fared so well because all of Queensland has taken the advice from Queensland's Chief Health Officer. What fantastic chief health officers we in this state have had. When members on the other side say, 'Table the advice; what is the advice?' I point out that these chief health officers have stood up in the media nearly every single day, given advice to the people of Queensland and taken to date thousands of questions on why different initiatives were put in. They explained what is occurring, let the public know the information they had at hand and referred to the AHPPC advice. It has been extraordinary.

I do not remember a time where we knew the chief health officers as well as we in this state did during the world health pandemic. To somehow suggest that any information given in relation to what is required to combat COVID was done in the dark, that nobody knew anything about it and that Queenslanders did not understand is completely and utterly misleading and wrong. These people have given of their time seven days a week, week after week, day after day—an incredible effort by our CHOs.

The Premier, the health minister and all ministers have stood up in the media and taken thousands of questions on this issue. Queenslanders were well aware of why these decisions were taken and that is why they followed the lead of the Premier. To suggest otherwise is misleading this House.

As we have seen, new strains can develop quickly. We are now facing a second Omicron wave with the BA.2 variant. It is important that we extend these public health provisions to ensure we can continue to respond to rapidly evolving situations. Anything else would be irresponsible. It is no wonder that at the 2020 election the people of Queensland so vehemently voted against those opposite.

When I became the Minister for Education I could never have predicted that a global pandemic would bring a complete change to the way school operated. I am incredibly proud of how hard my department and schools have worked. I welcome the students who are in the gallery. We are talking about COVID at the moment. I am talking about what we have put in place to keep schools open so students can get a face-to-face education. In Queensland over the last two years we have had a very good track record of keeping schools open. For about six months of last year, students, Queensland schools were the only schools on the eastern seaboard with face-to-face learning. Schools in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT were not fully open. Students were learning from home for about six months. That was completely different to the situation here in Queensland. That is because we have these health directives and we have kept Queenslanders safe.

I thank you, students. I know you have used your hand sanitiser. I know you have washed your hands. I know you have tried to socially distance as much as you can. I know the wearing of masks can be difficult. In primary schools it was not mandatory but I know that some of you may have been needed to wear masks. It has not been easy. It has been a difficult start to this term, but tomorrow you go on holidays. I wish you all the best. We will welcome you back on the Tuesday after Easter Monday.

My department has worked with Queensland Health to ensure that we have had pop-up vaccination clinics. I put another call out: vaccination is the way to go. It is the best protection. It is the best way to get over COVID quickly. I was triple vaxxed when I got COVID. Without doubt, I am sure that that is what helped me get back on my feet after seven days.

We had a comprehensive back-to-school plan. We have RATs in schools. We are assisting schools through today and tomorrow. We hope the holidays brings us to another phase of the pandemic, but we do not know where we are going to be. These directives are absolutely essential. Anyone who says that we do not need them in order to be nimble and responsive to whatever changes lie ahead is misleading the House. Thank goodness it is the Palaszczuk Labor government in charge in this state because if it were those opposite the floodgates would be open and the borders would be open. Lord knows where we would be. I support the bill and commend the bill to the House.