




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (7.04 pm): I rise today in support of the extension bill before the House. I always volunteer to speak on this bill because I find it interesting to look back on the last time we spoke on the bill and reflect on where we were at that particular point in time and where we are at now. There have been some significant changes over the last few years. I always find it really illuminating to do that and I always enjoy speaking on these extension bills.

It is fair to say—and I think many members have already touched on this fact—that the world has been on an absolute roller-coaster over the last two and a bit years during the COVID global health pandemic. We have seen weddings postponed or scaled down, family members who could not visit each other in different countries and in some cases, including in my family, people who have not been able to meet new family members at all. The number of people allowed into the birthing suite was limited in some cases and at some points in time.

I have said it before in this House and I will certainly say it again: the people of Queensland have stepped up in such a huge way and over a really long period of time. That has been tough. I do not know a single Queenslanders who has not made significant sacrifices. I want to acknowledge that sacrifice at the outset of my contribution. I am really glad that since my last contribution a number of restrictions have loosened, which is always wonderful to see. Later on I will touch on some of the other ones. I am going to start with the borders.

I know that borders reopening under the directives have made a huge difference to many families, certainly including mine. The borders were closed to New South Wales for what felt like large parts of last year. Late last year I got to see my nieces who live in northern New South Wales for my niece's birthday in December. It was really special. I still remember when my niece clapped eyes on my kids at the park and just how excited she was to have us there. I know those kinds of scenes would have been playing out right across Queensland and northern New South Wales late last year.

We actually got to spend Christmas as one big happy family in Murwillumbah late last year and Elyse got to spend her first Christmas with her cousins. I was worried that might not be a possibility, but it was so wonderful to do that as a family.

As members of this House would be aware, my father is from New Zealand, like many members of the Queensland community. Queensland has more Kiwis than any other state in Australia. Right before COVID hit I took my then partner to meet my grandparents. I figured if he still wanted to get married after that, he was a keeper because my grandparents are really terrifying people. My grandparents missed our wedding. If you met my nanna you would understand; she is a wonderful woman.

Mr Stevens: What happened to your then partner?

Ms PUGH: He is my now husband. I was getting to that, so thank you for that interjection. My grandparents met my then partner. Now we have been married for two years and they still have not met our daughter or my sister's daughter, Banksia, who is coming up to 2½. This is a really common story right across Queensland and Australia.

We know that the New Zealand government is closely watching the health policies and the COVID responses of Australia and the different states in Australia. They did close the bubble last year. The bubble was there for a while and then sadly it closed. They pushed back the opening of the border this year and they will do it again if they think opening that border puts their citizens at risk. I understand the Ardern government is doing it to protect vulnerable New Zealanders, like my grandparents Murray and Margaret.

We need to remember that our health response and our health policy does not exist in a vacuum. Our government policy impacts on whether hundreds and thousands of Queenslanders who have overseas family members will be able to go and see their relatives overseas. Governments of other countries will decide whether the borders are open based on how concerned they feel about our policy. A flight to New Zealand was once as easy as taking a trip to Sydney except you needed a passport. Of course, since COVID it has not been easy. We as a government have a duty to ensure that Queenslanders, wherever possible, can see their family. That means we have to get the health response right and keep our COVID numbers as low as possible.

Right now my family are very excited. Hopefully, it will be just a few more weeks till those borders are open, but those boundaries have been moved before. We have our fingers and toes crossed. At this point we are planning on a family reunion for Nanna's 90th birthday this December. We are really hoping to get over there to celebrate that.

In previous contributions on earlier iterations of this bill I have reflected that my daughter received her vaccine, and I am pleased to update the House that over the school holidays my son, Heath, was able to get his first and second dose of the Pfizer vaccine at Growlife Medical. He found \$10 on the ground on the way in to get his first vaccination, so he has a really positive memory because he found \$10. He was very happy about that. He went straight home and spent it on Robux, so he is a great advocate for vaccination because you might find money on the ground outside. I know that the Premier, the health minister and those on this side of the House have been encouraging parents of that age cohort between five and 11 to consider getting their young children vaccinated. I can report that after both vaccines I checked in with my son the next day to see if he was feeling tired and if he might try to get a day off school, but he just laughed at me and said, 'No, mum, I'm fine, but thank you.' My daughter tried to prenegotiate a day off school before she even got the vaccine. She said that she could be tired—she was not—and I refused her offer, but nice try, Allegra.

Members of the House would be aware that I actually did need a week off school—off parliament—because I have recently had COVID. I did a RAT test the Sunday before parliament was returning for the first time this year to ensure that I was fit and healthy and ready for duty. I had had a negative RAT test on the Thursday but felt fatigued, which I initially put down to being a mum of three with a busy job. However, I did wake up that Sunday morning with a runny nose and this time the line on my RAT test came up positive straightaway. I consider myself incredibly lucky: because I had recently had my booster, my chief symptom was fatigue and a snuffle, as I mentioned, for just a few days. I do consider myself to be very lucky, but I know that the symptoms are different for everybody and it is something to be taken really seriously. I consider my experience a great reason why people should definitely get their boosters because I really believe it made a difference in how I experienced the virus.

I want to thank the hardworking frontline workers of our magnificent Queensland hospitals, both in the COVID wards and beyond. I also thank the pharmacists and GPs who assisted so mightily with the rollout of the vaccine. We had so many doing the boosters in particular in my electorate. I got my Moderna booster on 10 January at the Darra Chempro. That was the first day I was eligible. I had made a lot of seniors calls earlier this year to make sure people had the opportunity to get their booster shot. I spoke to a couple of residents in Darra who told me that they were initially quite sceptical of getting the vaccine but that they had had a great chat with their pharmacist and he talked through all of their concerns at length. I think it was a pretty lengthy conversation with the both of them. He talked them through step by step, piece by piece and they decided to get the vaccine. They told me that their friend had the virus and he was quite sick, so they were really glad that they got it. They wanted to especially thank that hardworking Darra pharmacist, Andrew, who talked them around. When we consider that this kind of conversation must have happened thousands of times right around Queensland, it is just so incredible and it is a tribute to the caring and dedicated natures of our frontline health workers—our doctors, our nurses, our pharmacy workers.

I do not have much time left, but I did want to reflect on some of the changes that we have seen over the last few years in terms of restrictions being lifted. There are still many restrictions in place, but we have been able to lift the wearing of masks in large part whereas just a few months ago we were wearing masks pretty much everywhere. That said, I would certainly encourage people where they feel it is necessary in crowded spaces and when they cannot socially distance that they definitely should be wearing a mask. There is the fact that our borders are open and that is allowing those all-important family reunions and people do not have to do hotel quarantine because we have a purpose-built facility for that. Just a few months ago the Qld Check In app was in high usage and now we have been able to scale that right back. We are on the right path and we have the Chief Health Officer and the Premier working on making those determinations. I certainly commend this bill to the House.