




Speech By
Joseph Kelly

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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**PUBLIC HEALTH AND OTHER LEGISLATION (COVID-19 MANAGEMENT)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KELLY** (Greenslopes—ALP) (7.14 pm): That speech was an exercise in volume over substance. I assure the honourable member that we do not need this as a political football to take to the next election. We have low unemployment, a booming economy, air conditioning in every school. How many new schools have we built? How many stadiums in North Queensland? There is a service in your electorate, member. We have plenty of achievements to take to the next election and we will not be doing it off the back of a jetski either.

I want to rebut something that the member said that was completely and utterly false and misleading to this House. His notion that people died without being able to see their relatives is complete and utter rubbish. My wife is a registered nurse in an oncology unit, and through the entirety of the pandemic people were able to travel with exemptions to visit relatives.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Member for Hinchinbrook. Member for Coomera. Pause the clock. Member for Coomera, I ask that you cease your interjections. The member for Greenslopes has the call.

Mr KELLY: With exemptions, people were able to visit dying relatives. The reality is that those opposite would like to paint those difficult decisions that were made to keep Queenslanders safe as being heartless. Anybody who knows the work of Dr Jeannette Young knows that those decisions were made carefully and with the greatest consideration for those people. For members opposite to get up in this place and start to peddle this nonsense is really sad and shameful. It is another act of disgraceful behaviour that we have seen in this place today. I want to acknowledge—

Mr Dametto interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Hinchinbrook, you have had your opportunity.

Mr KELLY: He certainly squandered that opportunity, but I am not going to squander mine.

Mr DAMETTO: Madam Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take personal offence, I would like the member to withdraw.

Mr KELLY: I withdraw. I support the Public Health and Other Legislation (COVID-19 Management) Amendment Bill. I start by acknowledging the extremely hardworking health workforce which have been on the front line of responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic. I remind the House that we should never forget the more than 200,000 health workers who died as a result of caring for people with COVID-19. When we want to diminish COVID-19 as a serious illness, we should think about the families of those 200,000-plus health workers around the world who died as a result of COVID-19. The reality is that the majority of those people would have been women. If we did not live in such a gendered world this would have been on the front page of every newspaper, in everybody's Twitter feed, and being thought about and talked about.

I acknowledge the Premier for her leadership during this pandemic. I also acknowledge all of the health ministers and the former and current chief health officers. The decisions that were taken were never easy. They were always based on the best possible health advice and they were aimed at keeping Queenslanders as safe as possible. Since early 2020 the response to the pandemic has been changing and it has been proportionate to the threat.

It is sad to see the LNP joining with their One Nation mates to oppose this bill. I would not say they are joining with KAP, because I know the LNP and the KAP are not mates. Like most other things that the LNP have done during this pandemic, it has been based on chasing cheap political points rather than doing the heavy lifting that is required to keep all Queenslanders safe.

The damage the LNP did to the health system between 2012 and 2015 was immense. They decimated the exact parts of Queensland Health that would be required to respond to a public health emergency. If you would have remained in power, we would have been in real strife. Treasurer Cameron Dick, who was at the time the health minister, and our current Governor, who was at the time the chief health officer, Jeannette Young, should be commended for the work that they did to repair this damage. Dr Young truly reset our system to respond to a pandemic that she knew was inevitable. This is still a serious disease. We have witnessed multiple mutations, and the chance of future serious mutations cannot and should not be ruled out. The death rate in 2022 from COVID-19 is likely to exceed the road accident death rate in Australia by four to five times.

If that statistic was out there and understood widely—if the road toll suddenly jumped by four times—that would be on the front pages, that would be on the six o'clock news and that would be in people's Twitter feed. The reality is vaccination is our most effective tool for controlling this disease. I understand people who have questions about vaccinations, and I have discussed those concerns with many good people both in my role as an MP and as a nurse. To highlight how important vaccination is, I want to draw on some statistics from a book called *Unvaxxed* by Dyani Lewis which is available in the Parliamentary Library. At the height of the Omicron wave, the percentage of people eligible for vaccination who remained unvaccinated was very small. However, this group represented 18 per cent of all COVID cases, 45 per cent of all hospitalisations, 66 per cent of all those people in ICU and, sadly, nearly half of all those people who died. So a very small percentage represented a very large percentage of the people who were impacted.

While I understand that there are people out there with genuine concerns and I know that we health professionals have to work hard to understand and respond to their concerns, sadly there are also people out there who attempt to lure these good people with their genuine concerns into their far-right conspiracy driven political movements. Sadly, the LNP opposition, as outlined in the statement of reservation, seems to be taking a similar path, opposing sound policy for cheap political gain. We need the capacity to scale up our responses again should the threat increase. I want to challenge members of the LNP to specifically say which powers in this bill they do not believe the CHO should maintain. What are their concerns? Is it vaccination for staff in aged care? Is it preventing people from spitting on public officers? Is it people in hospitals or disability settings having to wear face masks? Which are the ones they think impact on people's lives and we should get rid of? Spell it out. Tell the people of Queensland. They cannot, but it makes for really good dog-whistling politics when you go out there and say, 'We oppose all of this,' while trying to appeal to that far right.

I also love the notion being peddled about putting the power in the hands of an unelected bureaucrat. Just the way this line is delivered is intended to 'other' the CHO—diminish the person, if not the position. It is truly disgraceful, but we have seen some truly disgraceful behaviour from those opposite today. Dr John Gerrard is a truly outstanding individual who acts with the highest degree of integrity and professionalism. To try and stick a label on him, as those opposite are doing, is truly appalling. The reality is that legislation of all sorts empowers public servants of all types in all sorts of ways, and this is no different. In fact, I would challenge anybody to say that there has ever been a parliament in the history of Westminster democracy that has not delegated powers to unelected people in the community. When has that ever happened before?

Our side of the House is really aware of the impacts on Queenslanders from this legislation that have resulted from the public health measures that were taken to keep Queenslanders safe, and we have worked really hard to help our community recover. Every minister on this side of the House and every member of parliament on this side of the House has worked really hard. The great news delivered today by the Treasurer is just the latest demonstration that our hard work towards recovery is paying dividends for all Queenslanders. I want to finish by saying that this bill continues the hard work the Premier has led since the start of the pandemic—that is, the work of keeping Queenslanders safe and leading the recovery. I commend the bill to the House.