




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 29 March 2022

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

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (7.33 pm): It is with great pleasure that I make my contribution with the Labor Party mantra of yesteryear—

It's time for freedom,

It's time for moving, It's time to begin,

Yes It's time

It's time for old folk,

It's time for children,

Time for freedom,

Yes It's time

It is time to realise the pain and the agony that businesspeople, communities and individuals have been through over the past two years of the COVID pandemic. We have the Delta strain, we have the Omicron strain and now we have Omicron 2 sneaking through the corridors. We need to be cognisant of the pain that has been felt over the past two years and how people have suffered. People need to look to the horizon for freedom for all their normal activities and business. People need to get back to normality as quickly as possible. What we have in this extension bill is a further impediment to the hope that people have for getting back to a normal life. That is not fair.

One of my constituents is a teacher who is now suspended. He has been a teacher for 10 years but has been suspended because he will not get vaccinated. I am triple vaxxed and I do not necessarily agree with his stance on the matter. However, his job—his life—has been put in limbo. With the extension of the extraordinary measures through the bill that is before the parliament tonight, he worries for his good teaching career. His employer has said that when this matter has been finished with they will welcome him back as he is a good teacher.

As I remember it, our committee dealt with this matter to 30 April. That is my recollection of the time when the current rule expires. The shadow minister has proposed that we extend it to 31 May, at which time we can revisit the matter. That is a very fair and reasonable proposal because we can come back if there are further outbreaks. I note that the health minister herself said today that we would have to have an urgent meeting. I have seen plenty of urgent bills pass through this parliament so that is not an impediment—particularly late at night with 18 minutes notice. Where is the member for Sandgate? The bottom line is that we can do that. If there is another outbreak, we can bring in all the necessary measures to handle it.

We need to give the business community, sporting communities and individuals hope that this horrible pandemic and the rules and impediments imposed because of it are coming to an end, as they should. We have seen the borders opening up. I have a family full of teachers. They have kids running left, right and centre with COVID, people are staying home and so on. My son's family has had COVID. We have all had an experience of COVID. I sat next to a COVID guy for a week and I did not get it. I must be immune to the member for Southern Downs.

We have all had a COVID experience and everybody is over it. I can assure the House that the businesses of the Gold Coast, particularly the restaurants, cafes and the entertainment industry, are very much over this pandemic. We want to get back to normal and we want a reasonable approach, just as the shadow minister has proposed, to address any outbreaks that should come from Omicron 2 or whatever Greek letter comes after Omicron. I do not know, I am sorry, but there will be a Greek letter to follow Omicron.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr STEVENS: I am not sure, member for Nicklin. The bottom line is that it is time to give confidence back to our communities. It is not right and proper for us to extend these enormous powers. The member for Scenic Rim referred to the Human Rights Commission being unhappy about them being extended. It is important that we give people hope that this matter is coming to an end. I cannot believe that anybody in this place would not support getting back to normality as quickly as possible. The very threat of continuing these existing extraordinary powers—and I think everyone on the other side would agree that they are extraordinary powers—puts a dark cloud over business, sporting communities—and we all love and support our sporting clubs—and individuals. I believe thousands of public servants have been affected. The people working for the government have been affected by vaccination issues and other issues. They would like some hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel in relation to the end of this devastating period in our history in terms of the COVID virus.

I am absolutely sure that we can seek our outcomes with the shadow minister's amendments to this bill that will give oversight and protection, should it be needed, if there are further outbreaks. I can assure that everyone, even in schools, are treating COVID now as, 'Oh, so what?' The people in the restaurants are treating it as, 'So what?' The people at sporting clubs—and I will be at the mighty Burleigh Bears this Saturday where I hope they win—will be treating it as, 'So what?' We need to be realistic in our approach and not go for the big stick approach in terms of putting in further extensions out there that frighten everyone in relation to this bill. We must understand that we can put in measures, as the shadow minister suggested, to ameliorate that fear and ensure that the community has confidence in the way we go in the future.

I take this opportunity in the last couple of minutes of my allocated time to address another matter. If you will excuse me for one minute, it does not relate to this bill. It has been brought to my attention that I may have unknowingly breached the confidentiality provisions of the Economics and Governance Committee. If that is the case, I sincerely apologise to this House.