




Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 30 March 2022

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.39 pm): At the outset, I wish to place on record my acknowledgement that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption and upheaval to the lives of many people around the world and, more specifically, here in Queensland. I acknowledge those Queenslanders who have lost loved ones. I acknowledge those Queenslanders who have lost livelihoods and had to sell property. I want to acknowledge all of those people who have given up their freedoms and have restricted and curtailed the normal things they would do in their life so that we could get to this place.

I also want to thank the emergency workers, the doctors, the nurses, the ambos, LifeFlight, the police and everybody who has been involved on the front line of keeping our community safe and acknowledge the sacrifices that they have made to be away from their families to spend time looking after people who find themselves sick or infected. With that said, it is now time for us to reflect: how did we arrive here? We arrived here because there was a worldwide pandemic.

In February 2020 the Public Health (Declared Public Health Emergencies) Amendment Act came to this place which extended public health emergency regulations to 90 days. In March 2020—two years ago—the Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Act was enacted, giving extraordinary powers to the Chief Health Officer and which had a sunset clause of 12 months. Given where we were at in the world at that time with the lack of vaccine availability and the things we did not know about the virus, I think that was a good decision that this House made with both sides of the House supporting that bill.

In March 2021—so we are one year into the pandemic—the Public Health and Other Legislation (Extension of Expiring Provisions) Amendment Act is extended again for six months, so now we are at a little over 18 months of restricting people's freedoms. In September 2021 we were back in this place extending them beyond that extended six months. We had said 12 months and we then extended it six months and then six more months, and here we are again back in this place and if this bill passes the extraordinary powers that curtail various people's freedoms and abilities to operate in the state the way that they would like will be extended for another six months.

The question for me becomes: when and under what set of circumstances should these powers finish? When should some aspects of these powers be incorporated into normal legislation such as if someone is knowingly contagious that they should not be able to go to an old people's home? We can write that into plenty of pieces of legislation; we do not need to extend emergency powers to do that. There are many pieces of the puzzle here, and that is why the amendment that we are proposing goes through to 31 May—that is, to give the government time to bring those necessary things that we may have to have on an ongoing basis before this House so they can be incorporated into regular legislation rather than a continuum rolling ball of emergency powers.

I want to talk a little about the health crisis, because at the start of the pandemic there was great fear of how we would manage it, and rightly so because our health system was already failing without the pressure of COVID in an unvaccinated population. We had to be extremely cautious and this House supported legislation that was cautious. In my electorate we are now at 97 per cent vaccinated and the First Nations population is at 80 per cent, and we are trying to get that number up still, but our health system is still in crisis and it is not being caused by COVID; it is being caused by a complete lack of built environment for a hospital. What we need in Toowoomba is a new hospital. The one we have is 30 years old and has reached its end of life.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** I hear the chirping from those on the other side at a time when there has been a 100 per cent increase in federal government spending in health. The question is: why have the people of Toowoomba not got their hospital built? The only reason is that it is sitting on the minister's table. There are companies that will be involved in a PPP—

**Mrs D'ATH:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. This has absolutely nothing to do with the bill and the member should be brought back to the bill.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui):** Member, I ask you to get back to the long title of the bill.

**Mr WATTS:** I will certainly get back to the bill. One of the components of the bill is for us to be able to manage people's health when they get COVID. One of the ways you do that is in a hospital. One of the ways you cannot do that is when the hospital is overcrowded and should have been replaced with a new hospital, but the minister was too lazy to put that forward.

**Ms KING:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. My point of order is that you have just provided guidance to the member to bring him back to the bill and he has continued to speak to that former topic.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member, I please ask you to get back to the long title of the bill.

**Mr WATTS:** The long title of the bill is about emergency powers which are to do with making sure we have a healthy population and that we can look after that healthy population. I understand that the other side might not think that hospitals play a part in that, but I have heard a number of people talking about hospitals.

**Government members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr WATTS:** Let me move on, because clearly they do not want to build a hospital in Toowoomba even though there are those who would fund it. So let me move on. We have a situation—

**Mrs D'ATH:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I believe that the member is deliberately ignoring your advice to not refer to those matters. They are not relevant to the bill.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will seek advice from the clerks. Member, I have asked you to get back to the long title of the bill. I have given you guidance and I may have to reconsider if you continue to stray from the long title of the bill.

**Mr WATTS:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. What we have on the other side is a party that promised that at 90 per cent vaccination rate it would review where we were at as a population. What we now find is that we are at 90 per cent—in fact, we are over 90 per cent—and yet we are back in this place extending these emergency powers forward into the future. Let us talk about what these powers mean and what they can do. The real question here is: should people in our society be free? Should they be free to live their lives without government interference in their lives? There is always going to be some level of government control in people's lives, and that is appropriate and that is what this House is for. However, there are those on the other side who constantly have a view that is a dystopian future for the people of Queensland. One is about maintaining power and control over the people of Queensland and telling them how it will be. I swore an oath when I came into this place to well and truly serve the people of Queensland, not control their lives as those on the other side would do.

Propaganda is information that is unusually biased to promote a political cause. If something comes forward from the Chief Health Officer, then publish the advice so that five million people can trust the decision. If the government of the day chooses not to publish that advice, it is nothing more than propaganda for political purposes. That is what needs to change in this whole process—that is, the health advice needs to be available for the five million people of Queensland so they can make sensible decisions about their own individual rights and their own individual health. I am triple vaccinated and my family are all vaccinated and I would encourage people to talk to their medical practitioner about

being vaccinated, but I would ask this government with its dystopian view of the future to seriously consider the mental health crisis that has been caused by the fear that it has driven into the community. Some 500 years ago a book was written by Machiavelli, *The Prince*, and it states—

It is better to be feared than loved. If no-one can be both, then it is better to be feared. It is safer than being loved since people with fear can easily be manipulated and controlled into following the demands of their rulers.

I am in this place—

**Government members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr WATTS:** It is amazing how they will try to—

**Government members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member, you have the call.

**Mr WATTS:** They will try to silence me because the population has been terrified, but the medical advice has not been published. People have not been able to see what it is we are running from.

This is a serious issue, but it is certainly not more serious than a democratic society having the right to operate and govern itself. This legislation should be amended so that we have an opportunity to put into law the things that we need to keep and get rid of what we do not need so that Queenslanders can get on with their lives. That was the commitment they were given by the government when we got to 90 per cent. If it is not going to be at 90 per cent, when do Queenslanders get their lives back? When does this dystopian government stop reaching into people's lives and making them scared of their own shadow so that they cannot get on with their lives? It is time to review this legislation and cast it out.