




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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MOTION

COVID-19, Response Review

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (4.49 pm): In making my contribution to the debate on the member for Noosa's motion, I reflect on and agree with those comments from the member for Greenslopes just a moment ago. It is so important that when we reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic we remember those frontline workers who really pulled us through. It is easy enough for a lot of us to reflect on the pandemic. It is one of those weird phenomena that at some point it feels like it was forever ago and occasionally it feels like it was just yesterday, but for the folks working on the front line I am sure that those times are never going to go away. The tough times are going to stick with them forever.

In so many ways it was a surreal experience. I do not think that is too strong a word to use. We talked constantly throughout those couple of years about the unprecedented impacts. Again, everything about that whole period felt unprecedented. It has come back to mind recently. I am sure everyone in this place remembers vividly the experience of trying to campaign through 2020 in the lead-up to the 2020 election. Now that we are unshackled on the campaign trail it feels so completely different.

I was bracing myself for what I assumed would be the busiest year of my life. No doubt it was busy, but I spent a lot more time at home with my then not yet one-year-old daughter than I might have anticipated at the beginning of 2020. There were obviously some silver linings like that around such a dramatic shift to life as we know it, but I think those are absolutely eclipsed by all of the impacts that were felt across the community. There were obviously enormous economic impacts, health impacts and mental health impacts. There were impacts on businesses and workers. Every facet of life went through a tectonic shift.

Back in 2020 it seemed absolutely appropriate, as the government did at the time, to initiate some parliamentary inquiries. I remember thinking at the time it was a little arbitrary and perhaps unusual to separate those two inquiries into one considering the economic responses to the pandemic and the other considering the health responses to the pandemic. As a member of the Health, Communities, Disabilities Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee in the 56th Parliament, I looked at those health responses. I have no quarrel with paragraph (b) of the amendment that has been put forward by the assistant minister. The health response from the Queensland government was quite extraordinary, and that played out in the death toll here in Queensland. We have a lot to be grateful for in that respect. I could not help but wonder, though, why it was that the Economics and Governance Committee, after conducting its own hearings, did not even produce an interim report. We at least got an interim report out of the health committee that term. The Economics and Governance Committee did not actually come up with anything, as far as I am aware. I will be corrected if I am wrong, I am sure.

By the end of that year after the election—obviously the pandemic was far from over—those two inquiries were dissolved. We had further lockdowns all the way throughout 2021 and 2022. It was in 2022 that my family was first touched by COVID-19. It was obviously a lot further down the track that the impacts were still being felt, which is why in December 2020, in September 2021 and in March 2022,

on two out of those three occasions I and on one occasion the member for South Brisbane put forward proposals to do pretty much precisely what we are talking about here: establish a parliamentary committee, a statutory committee, that could look at the all-encompassing government response to the pandemic.

We have seen again—and it is in paragraph (d) of the assistant minister’s amendment—that, yes, we have a federal inquiry on foot now, but that explicitly excludes state responses. I cannot understand, in the face of such a successful response, why we would not be interested in taking the time as a parliament to look at that response and to record in some kind of organised, centralised way what it was that worked and if there are ways we could improve. I think it is a perfectly sensible proposal from the member for Noosa and we will be supporting it.