



Speech By  
**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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### **TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL**

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (5.11 pm): The Termination of Pregnancy Bill 2018 has caused intense debate and a definite variance of opinion. There are no winners in a debate of this nature, no cause for celebration. I want to thank my colleague the honourable member for Hervey Bay for his brave and deeply personal speech a few minutes ago.

I can recall as if it were yesterday me as a young, somewhat emotional paediatric nurse, cradling babies who had no chance of living through the night. Images are etched in my mind of babies born with severe abnormalities with no hope of survival and parents torn apart by grief. Images also remain of children with gross deformities that made living a perilous journey and parents who were bravely facing the short futures of their dearly-loved offspring. Times have changed since then and medicine has advanced drastically, but there will still be children conceived who develop problems not compatible with life and who can cause fatal complications for the mother. Some of these problems do not present until late in the pregnancy. Some problems are not identified due to infrequent antenatal checks and other reasons. Not all pregnancies are wanted, welcomed or go well, although the majority thankfully do. More needs to be done in the education sphere regarding contraception choices and effectiveness. I hear stories about women who choose terminations and either regret them or suffer depression and similar symptoms. Conversely, all too frequently in the media we witness the horrific abuse and neglect of children who were not wanted or loved.

At the very core of this bill is the intention to decriminalise the termination of pregnancy, to enable reasonable and safe access by women to terminations and to regulate the conduct of registered health practitioners in relation to terminations. Of key importance is that a women's choice should be respected. That is not to exclude partners, family or others directly associated from being involved in a decision to terminate, but for so long women have not had a say. Their decisions were made for them in the 1950s and 1960s. Pregnant single mothers were pariahs to be shut away from society, many in church facilities, where they were forced to work as cleaners and reminded daily of their sinful ways. Meanwhile, the bloke who got them into this mess got off free to 'sow his wild oats'. These women delivered babies in inhumane situations. They were often drugged and incapable of seeing their newborns, let alone holding them, before they were whisked away for adoption. They were not allowed to terminate and they were not allowed to keep them. Years and then decades of grief followed. I know, as I have met many of these damaged women and cried with them for their loss.

For the past 40 years I have been married to a GP husband. He studied obstetrics as he wanted to be a GP who delivered babies, which he subsequently did and was very proud of. His diploma training required involvement in late-term terminations, and although it was 30 years ago he still remembers the solemnity of those moments despite being in agreeance that it was best under the circumstances.

This bill implements safe access zones for staff and patients seeking terminations. Whilst I support this provision, I make mention of the worst and most militant protesters who advocate disrupting workplaces, the Greens and unions like the CFMEU, who behave appallingly with no respect for private property and workers. Are they in favour of these amendments, which make it unlawful to protest nearby? It seems hypocritical to me.

On the issue of respect, it is simply untrue to say that the government has behaved in a respectful or apolitical way in this matter. They cannot say that this should be above politics and then throw abuse at the LNP, taunting and demanding that we have a conscience vote. The disgusting and hysterical behaviour of the member for Cooper, Kate Jones, on numerous occasions these past weeks made me physically sick. The member for Cooper, a minister at that, stood in this place and screeched and shouted across this chamber in a most unparliamentary and offensive way that we, the LNP, should grant MPs a conscience vote. If only she looked at the history books she would know it is common practice for to us do just that. Unlike Labor, who execute MPs for crossing the floor, we in the LNP get to discuss things in a mature and grown-up way. Minister Jones' appalling behaviour is reason enough to vote this bill down. Mind you, the Minister for Health, Steven Miles, and the member for Gaven, Meaghan Scanlon, are not too far behind. Today, the member for Cooper sat next to the health minister as he gave his speech, saying 'here, here' and nodding. I will be interested to hear what the honourable member has to say, but I cannot see her name on the speaking list.

On Monday, 8 October, a letter was published in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* signed 'Meaghan Scanlon, member for Gaven, Assistant Minister for Tourism Industry Development'. Her patronising and contemptuous language revealed an arrogance that seems to be the natural manner of members opposite. 'Little Miss', who has been here five minutes, had the audacity to lecture the LNP and has used this bill to score cheap political points in a public way via the local newspaper. She said—

Unfortunately, at the moment, I am the only Gold Coast Member of Parliament who has committed to voting in favour of changing these archaic laws.

She accused LNP members of showing no leadership in this debate. What right does the member for Gaven have to admonish and bully LNP members in this way? Only yesterday at the end of a committee meeting in front of secretariat staff I had to put up with goading that amounted to intimidation from the member for Capalaba. If I had not walked out of the room he would have continued. Sadly, it is typical of the thuggish conduct we are witnessing on a more frequent basis from a Labor government dominated and directed by unions. I feel sorry for new MPs, who are led to believe that it is acceptable to carry on this way. It is not.

I have had only one previous occasion to place a conscience vote in this place—one vote in almost 15 years. It is not something to take lightly or play with. This bill is highly emotional, as honourable members have acknowledged. To be given a conscience vote is a privilege. We should all show respect to the women of Queensland and their families and medical staff who are facing and making these heart-wrenching decisions, and we should show respect towards each other.

Provisions in this bill require doctors who have a conscientious objection to performing a termination to refer the women to a health practitioner who does not have the same objection. As women deserve a choice, so do those who are part of a termination. The medical team also deserves to have the right not to participate if it is against their beliefs, and surely a list of participating doctors could be made available. The honourable member for Caloundra's amendments seek to address this and other issues such as counselling, and I urge the government to consider them favourably.

In summary, like many honourable members and Queenslanders, I believe that medical and surgical terminations performed by medical professionals should be decriminalised. We have come a long way from the backyard abortions and gin and hot baths of past years. I recognise there are strong arguments against this bill. The provision allowing late terminations for social reasons alone is questionable motivation; however, this bill is asking us to have confidence in doctors—as I have told honourable members, I am married to a wonderful one—who have to determine whether late-stage post-22-week terminations can proceed if the case put to them is reason enough to terminate a foetus.

I have listened intently to both sides of this issue. I have lost sleep and agonised over my final decision. I have taken on board the survey of over 600 Currumbin residents that revealed that 72 per cent of people supported the move to make abortion access legal and almost 68 per cent of those supported terminations up to 22 weeks. Of course, I have taken on board the sentiments of LNP members, especially my branch, and resolutions made at our state conference. As a Christian, I have also had to grapple with the beliefs of the Anglican Church, even though I have always been of the opinion that religion and politics should never, ever be mixed. Matters of conscience are just that and must be respected and not turned into a pointscoreing brawl which, disappointingly, some MPs tried to do in the lead-up to this debate. We have a melting pot of opinions and emotions before us, and they all hold value.

I would like to place on record my appreciation to my electorate staff, Paula and Leesa, who have been at the coalface of all of the correspondence related to this bill. They have both been wonderful. I shall listen to the remainder of this debate as I give further thoughtful consideration to this bill before I exercise my very privileged conscience vote.