MP behind laws for alcohol-fuelled violence in Queensland says lockouts ‘don’t work’

FOR a man who doesn’t fit the politician mould, Anthony Lynham has still managed to achieve two long-held goals. Campbell Newman is gone and his legislation to stem alcohol-fuelled violence — the lockout laws — has passed through Parliament.

So what now? Will he quit, as the rumours that swirl down George Street suggest?

“Me? No. Unless ... what have I done? Have you got photos?” he jokes.

UNTENABLE: Minister says land court has to go

That’s as good an insight into former surgeon and now Minister for Natural Resources Anthony Lynham as you’ll get. He is not a real politician, none of his colleagues would make such a potentially dangerous joke because, let’s face it, there have been pictures in the recent past of Queensland politicians doing things they shouldn’t.

His background is as a maxillofacial surgeon, where he encountered the victims of violence on a daily basis and became an advocate for stronger alcohol laws.

He came into politics when he won the seat of Stafford in 2014 in a by-election following the resignation of LNP member Chris Davis, winning with a massive 17-point swing. It was a sign the then rampaging Newman government was on the nose with the electorate.

But Lynham admits to hating a lot of modern politics: the polarised and shallow debates, the 30-second grab, the one-upmanship and the opposition for the sake of it.

“I find it very hard,” he says with another response his colleagues would never make.

But he is adapting and the mining industry has a sort of grudging respect for him even if they have little time for most of the Palaszczuk Government.

At his time-worn offices in Mary Street he leans across the table and says: “I’ve got a scoop for you. Lockout laws don’t work.”

What? The lockout laws were his baby, the reason (apart from getting rid of former premier Campbell Newman) that he entered politics in the first place. It’s another line others would never let out, but he has context.

“People have focused on the wrong thing. Lockouts are only there to filter people out on to the streets so there isn’t such a demand for taxis,” he says.

“Lockouts in isolation are useless. The thing that works is the reduction in trading hours so it should be called the reduction in trading hours legislation. Lockouts do absolutely zero to take away alcohol-induced violence.”
“So you have to think: are lockouts totally necessary when we have a filter at 3am? It’s so we get a trickle out at 3am. We have two triggers to stop people congregating and that’s what is really important.”

But even with the reduction in trading hours, which has led to claims of a huge downturn in earnings for clubs and bars, the problem won’t go away.

“There will still be deaths,” he says, but cites studies in Newcastle, NSW, and Norway where similar strategies have been used, resulting in big reductions in assaults. While in Amsterdam the assault rate increased after trading hours were extended.

The politics of the lockout laws frustrates him as does a lot of what happens in George Street. He admits to missing his old job as a surgeon on Brisbane’s northside where he spent his days fixing the faces of people on the wrong end of violence.

“I miss it terribly,” he says.

And while he says he is in politics for the long run, there is one caveat; whether he would ever be forced to retrain as a surgeon to keep his registration.

“That would be my only block. That would be the only consideration I would have to take ... where the medical board sat (on the issue). It would be my only concern,” he says.

But there is a consolation.

“I know that here (as a politician) I have done much more good than I could have done there,” he says.

“I had been shouting on the sidelines for so long and seen nothing happen and to me it was simple ... evidence-based tools had to happen. So I feel I have done more good by moving this forward and doing preventive medicine which has done far more good than me operating and operating.

“I have stopped one kid in every three getting injured, one kid in every three from dying.”

He acknowledges he is an outsider in George Street and that may be a reason for his frustration.

“There is a huge difference in the Parliament between those people who have life experience and those who have a totally political background,” says the 56-year-old.

“But you need those people because they tend to be the better performers in Parliament and the media because they have had that long apprenticeship.

“I’d love to have dialogue about what we have to do and how we should do something and the people I have met in an open forum but you can’t have that dialogue because that’s the way politics is at the moment – the 30-second grab, the 24-hour media cycle. You just can’t have those long detailed debates which I love.

“I get very frustrated by things not being bipartisan. I can’t understand why people have to block something just because of the politics, even when they agree with it and you know they agree with it.

“Take the alcohol-fuelled violence. I know the Opposition agreed with me and yet they blocked it for political purposes and now they are riding it for political purposes because I met with both sides and I know what they believe. To see them turn on a dime for political expedience. Your beliefs are your beliefs.”

Which prompts the obvious question of whether he would do something for political expedience?

“I doubt it very much.”

Email John McCarthy