



Speech by

GLEN ELMES
Member for Noosa

Hansard, 30 October, 2008

Mr ELMES (Noosa--LNP) (2.57 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Health Legislation (Restriction on Use of Cosmetic Surgery for Children and Another Measure) Amendment Bill 2008. First of all, I congratulate the minister for introducing this legislation into the Queensland parliament. What we are here to do, and certainly the LNP is supportive of this, is to protect our young people under the age of 18. Any measure that we can take as a parliament to protect our young people is a very worthwhile thing. The explanatory notes to the bill refer to some of the cosmetic procedures that are outlawed. The member for Robina just mentioned some of them--for example, the tummy tuck, eyelid surgery, arm lifts, brow lifts, liposuction, facelifts, thigh lifts, body lifts, and the list goes on. The bill also talks about the use of solariums and some dental procedures, and seeks to roll those into areas that those under the age of 18 will not be able to access.

Of course, there are unfortunate occasions where children are born with some kind of a deformity or where children are involved in an accident. What we can do with this legislation is ensure that they have access to professionals to restore their quality of life, to help make their mental condition and the way that they are going to grow up and interact with society a damn sight better than what would otherwise be the case. In the case of young people, some surgery takes place for birth deformities and so forth. This includes surgery for things like protruding ears, birthmarks or hairy moles, or for young kids who are born with extra toes, extra fingers or extra skin on the ears. These are some of the things that would be addressed and will continue to be able to be addressed. What we are talking about here is the perception that has developed in society--and it is not just a recent perception--that young people look at their heroes, if you like, and want to be, act and look exactly like them.

A survey was conducted in a young girls magazine of 4,000 readers who were aged between 11 and 18 years. Of those 4,000 readers, 1,000 said that they would get surgery if they could and 80 said that they had already undertaken some sort of surgery. Lots of articles about these things get published in newspapers and magazines, particularly some of those teen magazines that are around the place, and I want to give some examples of the headlines that have appeared in these magazines over the past couple of years: 'The young using plastic for the perfect look'; 'Doctor, can you make me look like this?'; 'Some teens need plastic surgery'; 'Teenagers maxing out the plastic for plastic'; 'The shape of things to come'; 'Taunted kids turn to surgery'; 'Teens use surgery for weight reduction'; and 'The price of reduction'. Articles like that, and a lot more of that kind, have been published in Australian newspapers and so forth over the past few years.

We live in a society where image is everything, but then I think we always have. Today we can look at the internet, modern movies and so forth. Back in the era when I was growing up the television was black and white, but I still remember the Coca-Cola commercials--and I am sure many people here can remember those commercials--with the models bouncing beach balls down the beach. We all wanted to look like them. Of course, very few of us could--except you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and me perhaps! In an era prior to that we had cigarette commercials and posters with movie stars lounging around with cigarettes and so forth. I suspect that since man first walked on the planet our young have wanted to look, act and be exactly like their heroes.

I take the opportunity to add into the mix, if you like, a couple of other issues. One is the subject of tattoos and the other is the subject of body piercing. The explanatory notes talk at length about these procedures that break the skin, and both of these procedures--tattoos and body piercing--do break the skin. I know that tattoos are only available for people over the age of 18, but if you asked any person under the age of 18 where you can go to attend one of these businesses that do not ask for proof of age, they would be able to tell you. So one of the things we need to do is look at how these things are

going to be policed, and I will be interested to hear what sorts of procedures the minister says the government will put in place to look at the operations of some of these particular places. In terms of body piercing, you can do just about anything you like if you are between the ages of 13 and 18, except pierce the nipples or the genitals.

I would again suggest that for those aged between, say, 13 and 18, body piercing should be a part of this bill. Again, if we look at what the minister has on his lists and we are able to add some procedures that happen in our society then I think body piercing, particularly some kinds of body piercing, should be taken into consideration. We can go all the way through this and continue on, and I would like to look at where this particular discussion does finish. Do we start talking about male circumcision? If that is not some form of cosmetic surgery these days then I do not know what is.

In days gone by that was done as some sort of health related procedure, but that is certainly not the case in the overwhelming number of cases today. So there are areas like that which we can perhaps look at as well, and I would be interested to hear what the minister has to say about that. I know that I am taking an extreme view, but there are a whole range of things that fit between what we are talking about in terms of the set-up of the bill and something like male circumcision. Today in the Australian an article written by Emma Tom appeared with the headline 'Only inner ugliness can survive in the corridors of power'. In this article she talked about what some politicians in society have done, including the current German Chancellor, who gave short shrift to those who dismissed her style of dress and appearance but then went away and did something about her hairdo and the way she presented herself.

The article said that the President of Brazil has undergone botox treatments and a chemical peel while one of his colleagues has had surgery to staple his stomach and remove excess skin, which is something that really appeals to me, I have to say. The Italian Prime Minister has undergone similar sorts of procedures.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ELMES: Absolutely. So even in politics we have the situation where politicians--who at least are over the age of 18--do get these procedures done. The good thing about the debate today is that if our young people are watching on the internet at the moment they will be able to look around the parliament and know that none of the politicians in the Queensland parliament have undergone any form of cosmetic surgery--and if they had, they should be looking at suing the surgeon involved! So at least in Queensland we are showing the way.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ELMES: Yes, good. I again say to the minister that we need to be able to continue to define the procedures that our young people under the age of 18 should not be allowed to have carried out. We need to do what we can to try to remove the image build-up that goes on with young people. That will be exceptionally difficult, but it is something that we should, nevertheless, continue to try to do. As I said at the outset, I think what the government is trying to do with this legislation is exceptionally worthwhile. I certainly congratulate the minister for bringing this legislation before the House. Mr Deputy Speaker, can I close by saying--and this is away from the subject, but I hope you will indulge me for about 15 seconds--

An honourable member interjected.

Mr ELMES: No, this is all right. I had occasion to need the assistance of the minister a few weeks ago for a young bloke in my electorate, and can I say that the minister moved with lightning speed to get the work done that needed to be done. So I would like to publicly thank him for that. I commend the bill to the House.
