

Ms Margaret Quirk; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Dave Kelly; Mr Nathan Morton; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Mr Matt Taylor;
Mr Paul Miles; Mr Joe Francis; Mrs Michelle Roberts

FIREFIGHTERS — WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Motion

MS M.M. QUIRK (Girrawheen) [5.16 pm]: I move —

That this house urges the government to introduce without further delay workers' compensation laws that contain a rebuttable presumption that scheduled cancers diagnosed in firefighters were contracted as a result of their employment.

The history of this motion in this place goes back more than a year. In February 2012, I introduced a private member's bill entitled Workers' Compensation and Injury Management (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2012. I said at that time that I hoped the bill would receive bipartisan support. Unfortunately, that was not the case and the bill did not receive any support from members opposite. I think that is very important. As the member for Carine said, there are a lot of new members who might not be aware of the subject of this bill, so I will take a bit of time to explain what the intention of the bill was. Frankly, the inflexible stance that was taken last year was contrary to the evidence and the science. It is my fervent hope that the government has now seen the error of its ways and will pass legislation without further delay. In the meantime, since I introduced that bill I am aware of a couple of cases of firefighters who have died of cancer and whose loved ones did not have the benefit of workers' compensation payments because of the inadequacies of the existing laws.

The bill introduced last year was about the cumulative effect of the exposure of firefighters in their day-to-day duties—in some cases over many years—to a range of toxins and carcinogens. As I said in the second reading speech, it was narrow in scope but we believed that it would have made an enormous difference to firefighters contracting cancer through their years of occupational exposure to a conglomerate of carcinogens, hazardous materials and toxins. We considered that it was bad enough that a firefighter had to face the ultimate battle for life, but also he is burdened under the existing law with the knowledge that during his struggle with cancer, he is not entitled to workers' compensation payments and so his family faces the additional strain imposed by this financial hardship. The reason for the current law is that a worker must point to a particular source to prove what caused the cancer. In other words, firefighters must identify the carcinogen or toxins to which they were exposed and also when they were exposed to it. They must specify which fire, fires or emergency led to that exposure. Of course, practically, that is never possible. On the other hand, if a firefighter were killed or physically injured when attending a fire incident, he would receive compensation for work-related injuries. We believed that this very unfair anomaly needed to be remedied. As I said at the time the opposition introduced this bill, I was confident, which turned out to be ill-founded, that ultimately the bill would receive support from both sides of the chamber. As I said at the time, and I think it is no less true over a year later, we would all agree as parliamentarians that if we see a wrong we should seek to right it; if we see an injustice, we are duty bound to strive to right it. Unfortunately, that did not occur.

The federal Parliament passed similar legislation for ACT firefighters and for firefighters attached to airports, who come under commonwealth jurisdiction. Such legislation has also existed for a number of years in many overseas jurisdictions, principally, a number of states in the United States and provinces in Canada. The sky has certainly not fallen on anyone's head by having this legislation. On top of that, it needs to be said that we are probably talking about, at most, a handful of individuals each year who will be affected, and all we are talking about is their capacity to collect workers' compensation and their need to not make common law claims.

The opposition believes that legislation such as that which we are urging the government to pass acknowledges that WA firefighters, who are charged with protecting the community and property, have an inherently dangerous job and that these dangers are physical ones, not only through physical injury as such but also the imminent danger and damage caused by toxins and exposure to fumes, which is a day-to-day experience for firefighters. As I said, the legislation is about acknowledging existing inequities.

The other point that is very important to mention in this context is that it is not possible to take full precautions to eliminate the risk, because by the very nature of firefighting, firefighters have to wear personal protective equipment that is able to breathe to some extent, otherwise they get too hot. We have to acknowledge that.

There seems to be a rugby scrum over in the corner, Madam Acting Speaker!

We have to acknowledge that firefighters cannot totally protect themselves from exposure to toxins.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: They are all follicly impaired!

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is a follicly impaired rugby scrum, according to the member for Midland!

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The opposition is saying that as many precautions as can be taken are currently being taken, which acknowledges that there are no further precautions that can effectively protect firefighters from contracting cancer. We believe that this legislation is a must.

I also have to say that an extensive Senate inquiry was undertaken that led to the federal legislation. I commend members who are interested in this area to read the report of that Senate inquiry. There are some very moving accounts from firefighters and their loved ones on the practical implications of them not being able to claim workers' compensation; in fact, there were a couple of witnesses from Western Australia, and it is worth reading their moving accounts. I did read extensively from that report on the last occasion I spoke on this issue. I commend that evidence to members as it is worth reading.

The Workers' Compensation and Injury Management (Fair Protection for Firefighters) Amendment Bill 2012, which the opposition proposed, was quite simple. It would have inserted a separate part into the existing workers' compensation legislation. The bill had only five clauses. That provided a rebuttable presumption that specific cancers are occupational diseases for firefighters. Had that been enacted, it would have meant that the presumption existed that the cancers listed in the schedule to the act were occupational diseases for firefighters. Therefore, if it were a specific scheduled cancer and the relevant required years of service had been met, there would be entitlement to WorkCover. As I said earlier, this legislation did not create a new right; it did not, for example, create any new common law right. It was only designed to repair the inequity that existed.

At the time we moved that legislation, we were restricting our concentration to full-time firefighters, the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, the Department of Environment and Conservation and contracted firefighters with Transfield Services or at RAAF Base Pearce or HMAS *Stirling*. There were reasons for that; legislatively speaking, they were all defined as "workers" and it was a reasonably simple amendment to make to the existing legislation. However, there has been some discussion about including volunteers in the regime for any such legislation. I have to say that that contains some added complications, which I will talk about shortly.

In respect of the history of the debate, there was a conversion on the road to Damascus; on 31 October 2012, the Premier and the then minister, Troy Buswell, opened the new Fire and Emergency Services Authority headquarters in Cockburn, and a press release came out. Members will recall that in February 2012, the government's response was that there was no scientific evidence of a nexus between the exposure of firefighters to toxins and fumes, and the development of cancer; yet, in October, the government suddenly embraced the idea. Of course, I welcome that; I did not know I was that persuasive, but that was terrific. I do not know what happened in the intervening time, but I suspect it was a result of some quite significant and excellent lobbying by organisations such as the United Firefighters Union. In any event, by October the government had changed its tune. I will read in part from its press release of 31 October.

I will say that I have to make a complaint that will, hopefully, be conveyed to the people who put government media releases on the internet. When we print out government media releases these days, they print out in something like a size 6 font, which is very hard to read! In fact, I have had to print out this release on A3 paper so that I can actually read it! I am sure there is nothing sinister about this; I am sure it is not the case that we cannot read the press releases because they are padded out and do not contain anything, but for those of us in our middle years or maybe a bit older it can be difficult! In my capacity as shadow spokesperson for seniors and ageing, I would appreciate it if press releases could be printed out in a size 12 font!

The press release states, in part —

Mr Buswell said the package would include:

- Consistent insurance coverage for all volunteers operating under the emergency services Acts

That goes back to Serpentine–Jarrahdale firefighter Pam Storey, who worked for a bush fire brigade that was covered by local government insurance arrangements that were unsatisfactory. Had she been a volunteer but working for a volunteer fire and rescue service, she would have been covered by RiskCover. Again, firefighters can be working side by side and have inconsistent insurance arrangements, so I certainly welcome that commitment, but that is not what we are dealing with today.

The minister also committed to compensation claims being simplified for career and volunteer firefighters who develop a prescribed cancer. I will go back to the volunteers element in a minute. Not only is the minister accepting what we said should be passed, but he is also broadening the legislation to include volunteers. Minister Buswell goes on in his press release to state —

“Our Government greatly values the support and commitment by both career firefighters and volunteers who perform a sometimes difficult and dangerous job protecting WA communities,”

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Mr Buswell said the package would also amend legislation to ensure a career or volunteer firefighter who developed a prescribed cancer—one of 12 cancers as scheduled in the Commonwealth legislation—would have greatly simplified workers' compensation considerations.

He then went on to say, which I find remarkable in view of the history of the matter —

“It has been established that firefighters are at an increased risk of developing certain cancers through exposure to carcinogens while performing lifesaving roles for the community.

This next bit is quite important when it comes to volunteers —

“This legislation will provide cover for career and volunteer firefighters who predominantly undertake structural firefighting duties, and retrospectively take into account their past years of service.”

Many volunteers in the regions are required to fight not only bushfires but also structural fires. The recordkeeping involved in keeping track of who has gone to jobs that involve structural firefighting duties and those who have not is very difficult, as is the issue of baseline medical testing, which volunteers are not exposed to at the same level as career firefighters. We are calling for legislation for the professional firefighters first. The government seems to have walked away from that. It is very simple legislation. It consists of five clauses, and it will effectively cover firefighters who work for both the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Environment and Conservation. Then let us see how we can logistically cover volunteers. It is a very, very difficult drafting exercise. Keeping track of the health outcomes of 30 000 volunteers is incredibly difficult. For example, in September last year I asked how many appliances DFES had and where they were located, and I am still waiting for an answer to that question. If the Department of Fire and Emergency Services cannot even keep track of its trucks and appliances, I do not know how it will have any sort of meaningful monitoring or program relating to volunteers. That is not to say that we oppose it, but technically the legislation will delay providing protection for professional firefighters. It will be a very messy piece of legislative drafting. We have to remember that fundamentally this is about workers' compensation. We need to cover people who earn a wage and are workers in that sense. If the minister can convince me at some later stage how this can be achieved legislatively and what sort of figures would be around the 30 000 or so volunteers to be covered under the government's commitment, I am happy to be convinced otherwise.

Following the announcement made in October by the then Minister for Emergency Services, we then had the election policy, which again contained a commitment to such legislation. In particular, at page 7 of the policy, it states —

A re-elected Liberal Government will introduce amendments to legislation which ensure a career or volunteer firefighter who developed one of 12 prescribed cancers recognised in similar Commonwealth Legislation would have a significantly simplified workers' compensation consideration.

Again, there is the issue of how workers' compensation can apply to volunteers. I do not want to nitpick or be negative, but it seems that there is a misunderstanding about how laws can operate. Then there are weasel words such as it will apply to volunteer firefighters “who predominantly undertake structural firefighting duties”. Again, there are qualitative and subjective words such as “predominantly”, which mean that the proposal as it stands is somewhat illusory. As I have said, I am happy to be convinced otherwise that this can work within the workers' compensation scheme, but I am just not sure.

I think people on both sides of the chamber would acknowledge that the member for Vasse is a very astute political animal. He made this commitment on the basis that he included a group of 30 000-plus volunteers, and that, of course, would be electorally very much supported. He thought more about the venal political concerns than he did about the legislative scheme and the fact that this related to people being able to perform their paid jobs in a manner which is as much as possible free from hazard and which, if not free from hazard, would at least provide the protections of the workers' compensation system.

I am not being critical, but I think that members who were not here during last year's debate need to understand the conversion on the way to Damascus. The now minister, the member for Jandakot, was one of the few government members who spoke on the bill and was genuinely supportive. However, during the debate in this place on 8 August, he said —

The issue, however, that we now face with the member for Girrawheen's private member's bill is not that we do not absolutely agree with what she is trying to achieve. Under the federal act there is a general presumption that when a worker suffers from an asbestos disease—I use the parallel to cancers and exposure to toxics caused by fire—and his or her employment has involved exposure to the inhalation of asbestos fibres, the disease is deemed to be due to that employment. However, there is a clear medical basis for that special arrangement. Presumptive legislation for firefighters in the absence

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of clear and civil data—at the moment as we speak right now—specific to Australian conditions has far-reaching implications for the workers' compensation scheme. I note that as we are the guardians of taxpayers' money, we have to be aware of the consequences of our actions, no matter how well intended they are.

The other person who spoke on this bill and was genuinely supportive but had similar reservations was the member for Eyre. The member for Eyre was concerned that no studies had been done in Australia at the time. However, as I pointed out to the member for Eyre just this afternoon when we had a chat about this issue, in relation to the nexus between smoking and lung cancer, health authorities in Australia acted following overseas research. We did not feel the need then to do independent parochial studies on that nexus between lung cancer and smoking; we accepted the medical evidence that was available overseas. The evidence from overseas is substantial in the case of a nexus between firefighters' duties and cancer. A huge study was done of over 100 000 firefighters in, I think, Minneapolis, and recent articles of great stature in publications such as *The Lancet* also point to this nexus. A lot of work has also been done post September 11 in relation to the health outcomes of firefighters who were involved in the rescue missions at the World Trade Center. In fact, I know from speaking to firefighters who were at that site that all of the glass in those buildings was reduced to powder. On the whole of that site, there was virtually no glass left; it was just powder. So the amount of toxins and carcinogens that was ingested by those rescuers over a three-month period was substantial, and the number of fatalities on that day has been followed by a significant number of people suffering cancer and respiratory diseases, leading to further fatalities.

To conclude at this stage, the science is there. The duty to look after people who protect our community is there. It is incumbent upon us as legislators to right what is a significant anomaly in the existing laws. It is simply unfair and unjust that families of firefighters are in financial difficulty because of this legislative anomaly, and it needs to be righted without further delay.

The government's legislative program is not heavy, although the member for Carine seems to think that there is a large legislative agenda. It seems to me that the time is right and the opportunity is there within the legislative program to introduce this legislation.

I do, however, understand that if the government wants to progress at this stage with making provision for volunteers, that will create some difficulty in terms of the scope of the workers' compensation legislation. I would, therefore, be very interested to hear the minister's solution for how that will operate. We are not unsupportive of making provision for volunteers. We think that down the track there does need to be provision for volunteers.

But let us get this legislation in now, and let us protect the 1 000-plus firefighters in the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the fire managers and firefighters at the Department of Environment and Conservation. Let us get that in place, and we can then look at how we can implement a scheme for volunteers that is fair and practicable and will not cost too much.

With those words, I will leave it to my colleagues. We now have a new Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Jandakot. I know that he is a minister who is committed to this legislation. Last time we debated this legislation, the member for Jandakot was constrained by his obligation to comply with the direction of his colleagues not to vote for the bill. Now that he is the minister in charge of this area, I would hope that he no longer feels that he is operating under a constraint to vote against this legislation and that he will give us an indication of when we can expect the legislation to be introduced.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [5.43 pm]: I rise to add some comments in support of this motion. I would like to congratulate the member for Girrawheen for bringing this matter before the Parliament. As the member has outlined, this matter was brought before the previous Parliament, and we did have general support from those members on the other side who spoke on this legislation. Therefore I really did not understand, to tell members the truth, why they did not vote for this very important piece of legislation. As the member for Girrawheen has told us, when the Barnett opened the new station complex in Cockburn it announced that it was proposing, as part of its policy, legislation that would have the same purpose and effect as the legislation that was brought to this house by the member for Girrawheen.

I would like to make many comments, but I have been told that a number of members wish to speak on this motion, so I will keep my comments rather brief and just make some of the more pertinent comments that I wish to make. Workers' compensation is, of course, a vital and very important legislative and policy area that Parliaments and governments have to deal with, because, as we all know, the workplace is not always safe, but some workplaces are more harmful than others. In some occupations, it is not possible to make the workplace completely safe, and firefighting is one of those areas.

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Workers' compensation is a system that we, as parliamentarians, have enacted due to community support for the principle that if a person is injured at the workplace, they should be compensated. The workers' compensation scheme is built on the fact that it does not matter whether the employer was at fault or was negligent; if a person injures themselves at the workplace, they will receive compensation, and that is the way it should be, because workers can have their lives destroyed—their families can also be destroyed—through no fault of their own. It may not even be a fault of the employer. That is why we have a workers' compensation scheme. That is why we have a statutory scheme that seeks to protect, or to provide compensation for, workers who are injured at the workplace. We also have another legislative policy framework, and that is occupational health and safety. Under that framework, employers are obligated to make the workplace as safe as possible. Unfortunately, every week in Western Australia, someone dies at the workplace. As the Premier has told us, the mining industry has a very unsafe work environment, and deaths occur on mining sites basically on a weekly basis.

As the member for Girrawheen mentioned, firefighters work in an environment that is impossible to make completely risk averse to health problems or health consequences. I have a nephew who is a fireman. The stories that he tells me about what he has to endure on a daily basis would, I am sure, persuade members on the other side, if they are not already persuaded, that they should support the legislation.

Firefighters have a special status in our community. I have been a member of this house for just over two years, and in that time we have had many debates as a result of fires. As we all know, there were the hills fires, which were adjacent to my electorate, in Roleystone, or the Kelmscott hills. There have been fires in the Margaret River area, and there have been fires in Toodyay. Fires are something that we live with. But firefighters do not deal just with fires; they also attend car accidents. They attend house fires from which they have to remove dead bodies, often infants. So, the mental stress that a firefighter has to endure is significant. As the member for Girrawheen has told us, because of the fumes that firefighters have to endure in their workplace, there are cases of cancer, or work-related cancer consequences, as a result of being a firefighter. Surely, as a Parliament, if we consider ourselves to be a decent body of people, if we are part of a civil society, and if the Liberal Party wants to be true to its liberal philosophy and, some would say, its egalitarian principles—although that would be debated under some political theories, but there are some strains of classical liberalism that refer to equality and egalitarianism and that Parliaments or governments will enact legislation when it is absolutely necessary—there is no doubt that the Liberal Party will support the bill that was brought to this house by the member for Girrawheen.

I will read out a poem about firefighters. It is incredibly important that all members of this house, particularly members on the other side who voted against legislation when it came before the house in the last Parliament, really sit back and reflect that if they do not support this motion, they are saying to our firefighters that it does not matter whether they become sick or die as a result of work-related disease. Surely that cannot be true. I will read this poem —

I AM YOUR FIREFIGHTER

I spend 1/3 of my life away from my family, so I can protect you and your family.

I love you, even though I have never met you.

I would gladly die to save your life, or the lives of your neighbors.

I gladly risk injury to protect your property.

I love my life. I chose this life above anything else in the world.

I am your firefighter. When something terrible happens in your life, you can always call me.

I am waiting for that call. It is what I live for.

I will come flying to your home or business to assist you in any way I can.

My food can wait to be eaten.

The training class I am taking can be paused, because you called.

I am your firefighter. I hurt. I cry. I laugh. I am human.

I learn to cope with neglect from you.

I have so many things to offer, but somehow I get lost in the political shuffle.

I work, and think, and try to come up with ways to make your community better, safer.

I put all those things aside the minute the Alarm rings, and you need me.

I am your firefighter. The call comes in... "There's smoke in my bedroom"

I am on the way. Only 3 of us on this fire truck, but we'll do our best.

Blackness is all you see, choking, blinding, smoky, blackness.

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A hand is touching you. It is rough and bulky, covered in a glove.
I hand you to my partner, then search on for someone else.
I am your firefighter. Sunlight breaks on your face as you leave the burning structure.
Safe. Safe. Safe. Breathe the clean air. Breathe
You hear a loud mechanical wailing coming from the building.
The one who brought you out, yells, "If we only had more men" and rushes back in.
Now he is dragging another who looks like him out the door.
I am that firefighter. You watch as the fire truck drives slowly by.
The wailing siren breaks the quiet morning.
The slow parade of firefighters marches past you.
The flag above you waves softly in the breeze, but halfway down.
The flag over me is still. For you see ...
I was your firefighter. Don't cry for me. Cry for my wife.
Don't pray for me. Pray for my brother firefighters who need the strength.
Don't let my life be in vain. Do all you can to help my Fire Department.
Don't say "What a tragedy", Thank God another life was saved.
You see, I chose this life. It is all I have ever wanted.
I am A Firefighter!

I conclude by urging all members on the other side to read the speech that the member for Girrawheen made in February 2012—which can be found in *Hansard*—when she brought a bill before the house. That gives an eloquent and comprehensive analysis of why the member for Girrawheen was motivated to bring this matter before the house and why we all must support this motion today.

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean) [5.53 pm]: I rise to support this motion. I begin by commending the United Firefighters Union of WA for bringing this issue to public attention. We hear a lot of people say that they really appreciate the work firefighters do, they are a very important part of the community and they should be rewarded well for what they do. The fact is that without the advocacy that the United Firefighters Union provides for this group of workers, their conditions would not be anything like they are today. So, logically, if people really love their firefighters, they really should share some of that love around for their union. The fact is that without the advocacy of that union, firefighters would not be in the position they are today, and this particular issue—this change to the workers' compensation act we are seeking—would not be where it is today. It is fashionable in this place to take a pot shot at various unions, so I just wanted to remind members that if they like police officers, nurses and firefighters, they really should share some of that love with the unions that represent them because they are the ones who, in reality, bring these issues to the attention of the public and get the changes made to support these very important workers.

As most in the chamber will know, for many years prior to coming to this place my previous experience was in the trade union movement. That involvement taught me a little about workers' compensation. At United Voice we provided a workers' compensation service for our members, so that members of our unions did not have to seek to have their workers' compensation claim progressed by one of the private law firms out there that are very willing and eager to progress someone's workers' compensation claim for a fee; they could come and have their workers' compensation claim progressed through their union at virtually no cost. Because of that, I have seen hundreds of workers from a variety of industries come through our office and have their workplace injury dealt with. Having seen that, the workers' compensation system is a good one, but it is also at times incredibly stressful for the injured worker. We all think we are bulletproof; we all think we are going to go to work and do our job—in the case of workers like firefighters, act courageously—and then come home and spend time with our family. Sadly, when we get injured it comes as a bit of a shock, and all of a sudden we are thrown into the workers' compensation system, which most workers do not understand, and we very soon realise that it is quite a stressful system.

One of the points of stress in that system is being able to prove that the workplace injury or disease is a result of the occupation. It is not just taken for granted that if somebody contracts some disease or injures themselves that they are then covered by the workers' compensation system. They have to show that the disease or injury is directly attributable to their occupation. In the case of firefighters, it had been long suspected that many of the cancers that their members attracted were the result of them being firefighters. But it is incredibly difficult for

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them to prove that their cancers are directly related to their occupation in that when they attend a fire they breathe in a lot of toxins over a long period, which then makes them more susceptible to certain types of cancers. So, they get a terrible thing like a cancer and suspect it is as a result of them being firefighters, but under the current legislation it is incredibly difficult to prove. So, they are grappling with this life-threatening illness, and the workers' compensation system as it currently stands is not there for them. The idea of amending the workers' compensation legislation, not for the general population but specifically for firefighters, is so that if they contract certain types of cancers, the legislation will provide a presumption that it is because of their occupation, which would take away a lot of stress for firefighters. They would then not be in the position of having to prove the cancer was caused by their occupation. In fact, it would be the reverse; it would be for others to prove that their cancer was not as a result of their occupation in order to deny them access to the workers' compensation system.

This is a reform that the union, on behalf of its members, sees as a practical way of addressing this issue. It is a reform that is now not just a whim or an idea; it is a reform that is now backed up by science. There is now a scientific body of work that demonstrates that a number of cancers can be directly attributed to the work that firefighters do. The science is there. It really now is incumbent upon us as a Parliament to make this reform a reality. In the last Parliament, Labor introduced a private member's bill. The member for Girrawheen introduced that bill to put that reform in place. I have read her speech. She was very optimistic that the private member's bill would achieve bipartisan support because, given that the science is there, given that there are other precedents in the United States, Canada and federally here, it just seemed as though it should be done. I know that she was greatly disappointed, as were the firefighters, that the members of the Liberal Party and the National Party could not bring themselves to vote for this legislation. We hope that by raising this issue again through this motion, this Parliament will do the job. We are particularly hopeful because prior to the election the Liberal Party put out a policy statement stating that it would support such legislation. I do not know what caused the change, but the very good advocacy of the United Firefighters Union is probably the reason, again, that there seems to have been a change of heart by the government.

Through this motion we are saying that the science is there, the UFU says it is time to do this and it is an adequate response, and the Liberal Party made an election commitment to do this. Let us bring it on without delay. A lot of things get promised during an election campaign and they never see the light of day. We do not want to see this commitment or this reform being one of those broken election commitments.

As the member for Girrawheen pointed out, it is true that the commitment given by the Liberal Party during the election campaign had some qualifications in it, and it had some complications in that it extended to not only professional firefighters but also volunteers. We hope that the qualifications that were given in the policy and the commitment to extend it to volunteers do not result in this reform for professional firefighters being delayed. We are not opposed to giving additional benefits or protections to volunteer firefighters—not at all. But we do not want to see the complexities that that might throw up leading to the much-needed changes for professional firefighters not being introduced. We know that the new minister, who seemed to be supportive prior to the election, has had a lot on his plate since he took over. I have watched him battle through those issues in the chamber and he is to be congratulated for the enthusiasm with which he has dealt with the corrective services portfolio. I do not want to see him sidelined from this very important reform that the firefighters want, that the science compels him to do and that the Liberal Party platform commits him to do. There should be no delay. The legislative change to amend the workers' compensation act is really quite simple. The member for Girrawheen gave it to the minister on a plate in the last Parliament. It is now just a case of getting on and doing it. We urge the government to do it and we urge members tonight to support this motion.

MR N.W. MORTON (Forrestfield) [6.05 pm]: I feel compelled to speak on the Address-in-Reply motion. I just want to tell some stories of mine. I will start with a conversation I had with the member for Alfred Cove over lunch. We got talking about 9/11, of which everyone in the chamber would be deeply aware. We all know where we were and what we were doing when this terrible terrorism attack occurred in the United States. I certainly know where I was. I had the privilege of visiting the World Trade Center approximately 12 months before that attack and I think having that firsthand knowledge of the site itself gave in-depth knowledge about the other infrastructure that abounded at that location, including not just the structures above the ground, but also the structures under the ground with the commercial aspect, the subway lines, the plaza and the other buildings. The thing that struck me when I visited that site was the number of people visiting that location at any one time. Of course when I watched in horror as planes flew into the buildings, it was the images of the brave emergency service men and women, in particular the firefighters of New York City, that were strewn across televisions near and far—the brave deeds they undertook on behalf of the citizens of New York City, not just at the time of the disaster, but also in the ensuing weeks and months.

Closer to home, I have a dear friend I have known for many years who is a career firefighter. In actual fact he is based at Armadale and the last time I saw him was towards the end of the last school year when I was a deputy

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principal in the Armadale area. I got a phone call from the front desk saying a bunch of firefighters were there asking to speak to a member of administration. I thought: Is the school on fire? I was not quite sure. They came through the office and there was my friend. There was a bit of a reunion and he very quickly got down to business and said that all pleasantries aside, they were there to review our fire response procedures and they then very diligently went about doing that. I had watched my friend many years prior as he pursued the course of joining the firefighters as a career firefighter with much dedication and perseverance. There were many hours of fitness training and there were many hours of reviewing for the academic side of the testing that was to come, and he did so with great determination. He is a man with a young family, two young daughters and a lovely wife, and I would hate to think that in the pursuit of his job, a job that serves the community at large, that in performing those duties, he would in some way, shape or form be at harm or in harm's way or have his health affected because he has to perform those duties on behalf of our community. I would like to think that the state would have his back. The dangers I talk about are of course exposure to things like bushfires, house fires, factory fires, chemical spills and fires, serious car accidents and other community services that our firefighters offer the community. I guess it is one of those things that no-one really thinks about until they need them.

I refer to a personal experience. I remember a Sunday in February fairly recently when I was sitting watching the cricket on the sofa, which is a rare moment, but one I try to enjoy when I can. This one-day match was in Perth and from memory the commentators were Michael Slater and Mark Taylor—do not quote me on that. I think it was Michael Slater who started saying in his commentary that reports were coming through of houses burning down in Roleystone. For those members who do not know, my parents live in Roleystone, so of course I sat up and took notice. As the reports continued to filter through, the number of houses grew and grew, so I was quickly on the phone to my parents and spoke to my mother who was in a slightly panicked state, as members can imagine, and I asked whether there was any way I could assist. I was still able to gain access to their property, which I did, and pursuant to that my parents were evacuated from their house and we ended up with several people staying at our house for several days. But they are the things we do.

Can I get back to the firefighters, who are the subject of my point, and who perform their duties with distinction? Testament to that is that not one life was lost during those fires. They were fires that saw 70-plus houses destroyed. I saw firsthand their dedication to their cause, their dedication to the community and the way they went about performing those tasks without fear or favour. Indeed, as recently as 3 May there was a fire in my own electorate of Forrestfield in a house where nine people were saved, including a baby. Who was there to do the saving? It was none other than our lionhearted firefighting men and women—men and women who put themselves, as I have said, in harm's way in the pursuit of the conservation of our peace and safety? In August last year—I have a picture of this moment, which I am happy to lay upon the table, that depicts me, the Premier and one of our upper house colleagues, Hon Alyssa Hayden—we had the pleasure of meeting the seventy-second graduating class from the firefighting academy, which happens to be based in my electorate. It was a rare moment of getting to speak to these people who are very dedicated and passionate about what they do. They are an outstanding group of people, who are fit, strong and dedicated individuals. When we were mingling with them at one end of the group, I asked a general question of seven or eight of them about whether they ever consider the danger they put themselves in when they charge into a house fire or a bushfire. Their response was unanimous and succinct. They turned to me and said, "Nathan, we have the training and we have a job to do." I certainly felt far more secure knowing we have highly trained individuals out there potentially putting themselves in harm's way for the security of our community.

Mr J. Norberger: Selfless.

Mr N.W. MORTON: Absolutely. Thank you, member for Joondalup.

Their training is extensive and exhaustive, including much fitness, medical and academic testing and, of course, job-specific training so that they are best placed to ably assist and support our community.

As I alluded to, I am very proud that the Department of Fire and Emergency Services firefighting training academy is located within my electorate of Forrestfield. Indeed, as we speak, the recruitment process is underway to find the next batch of outstanding young men and women who will take up the cause as firefighters within the state of Western Australia. I know that at 547 Dundas Road in Forrestfield, some outstanding young people will be aspiring to that cause.

I want to finish with one final personal story. This person was a friend of my parents. As teenagers, as is often the way when trying to get a part-time job, we use our network, be it very limited, to try to obtain some part-time work. This was one of those moments. This particular day, the person in question came to our house in Roleystone to pick me up and take me to the place of employment, which was in East Perth. It was not a short drive for a rather introverted teenager. There are two things from that journey that spring to mind that have stuck

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with me. The first is the awkward silences that occurred due to my being a teenager who did not quite know what to say or where to look. I will get to the other one in a second. This man was a Vietnam veteran who had seen active service in Vietnam. Suddenly we were conversing when he started talking about the firepower they used and the things they used to do. By the time we arrived he said, "When I left the army and got back to Perth I joined the volunteer firefighters, and I had to fight a fire." Remember, this is a man who saw combat action in Vietnam. He said, "Nathan, of all the things I have done, the scariest thing I have done is fight a fire."

I finish by commending the government for pursuing this legislation.

MR S.K. L'ESTRANGE (Churchlands) [6.15 pm]: I would like to contribute to the debate on workers' compensation for firefighters. It has been heartening to hear such effective words spoken in this house about the support we are trying to achieve for our firefighters and their families. I have a personal history of service in the Defence Force and so I understand the motivation behind young men and women who do something that could be dangerous in the service of their community or country. I have also been a consultant for the resources sector. One of the consulting roles that I played for a time, with a large resources sector company, was in business resilience and recovery program planning. A key component of that is emergency response planning and the involvement of what is called the emergency response team. The emergency response team performs very similar duties to that which a firefighting team performs. I got to know those guys pretty well. They worked in remote areas in the north west, particularly in the Pilbara.

Emergency response teams and firefighters have to operate in very difficult conditions. They must operate in confined spaces; at heights; sometimes over water carrying heavy equipment, putting them at risk of drowning; they have to deal with grass fires; structural fires; vehicle crashes and vehicle fires; and hazardous materials, including chemicals and toxic fumes. Our firefighters and people working in emergency response teams face some obvious dangers. It is obvious that when someone confronts a burning building, they could be burnt or the building structure could collapse and crush them. There are very obvious and clear dangers. However, some of the dangers are not so obvious. Some of the dangers may come to the firefighter immediately without them knowing. For example, a firefighter might inhale very dangerous fumes and pass out. In that process, they might quickly understand that they are facing a very grave danger, or the danger could be subtle and occur in a small amount over a short time when attending an event, or it could occur over five or 10 years due to multiple exposures to a toxin or contaminated hazardous materials, and that very real danger may result in a cancerous disease. It is the not-so-obvious dangers that the firefighters sometimes do not think as much about that we, as policymakers, should think about and give serious thought to when looking after our firefighters.

I draw members' attention to the notion of rebuttable presumption. I found a definition of "rebuttable presumption" that I will share with members. It is an assumption that is taken to be true unless someone comes forward to contest it and prove otherwise. That definition of "rebuttable presumption" would be very reassuring for firefighters because it means that if they contract one of the scheduled cancerous diseases as a direct result of their service as a firefighter, they can be looked after because they do not have to prove that the cause of the cancer was a particular event or series of events during their service; rather, the onus of proof is on another party to prove that it was not caused by that. I think that can provide firefighters with some assurance—God forbid that they do not get any of these diseases; but if they were to get one, there will be some sense of security that we will support them.

My understanding of the Liberal–National government's intent is that it is looking to introduce amendments to legislation which will ensure that a firefighter who develops one of the prescribed cancers recognised in similar commonwealth legislation will have a significantly simplified workers' compensation consideration. That is important. I related this to a former firefighter. I interviewed this former firefighter recently, a fellow called Paul Lawrence, who served from 1994 to 2009. I tried to get a sense from him of, first, what drove him to become a firefighter; and, second, what were some of the dangers he faced and that he often reflected on as a former firefighter. Before he was a firefighter, it is interesting to note that he was a Royal Australian Infantry soldier serving in the 2nd/4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment. He went on from his army service to become a firefighter. I had a chat to him about this. What came out of our chat was some commonality of what drives people to serve in industries that are predominantly dangerous. Duty was one of the things that came to mind, as was a service ethos; the challenge and excitement of the job; courage; teamwork; and mateship and camaraderie. But, more than anything, what really came to the fore when push came to shove, and when danger was imminent, was this need to help others and to put self second. Taking on danger as a part of the job and not letting your mates down was a key aspect of both his careers, as a soldier and then as a firefighter. I think a lot of young men and women do this; in fact, more often than not, it is the younger men and women in our society who think they are invincible. They think they can take on risks and do really dangerous and challenging jobs, because whatever went wrong or whatever happened that hurt somebody else will not happen to them. Like a lot of people my age, I tend to think this is pretty foolish and foolhardy, but the young people who take on these

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dangerous jobs, working as police and firefighters or in the defence forces and emergency services, take on these jobs for the reasons I explained earlier: duty, service ethos, challenge, courage, teamwork, mateship and camaraderie; and most of all to not let your mates down and to help others. Saving lives can make ordinary people extraordinary or make them do extraordinary things. In trying to understand how young people think, I realised that a lot of young people, whom I had come across in Afghanistan through my time in the Army and whom I met after returning from Iraq and from Afghanistan, had openly said to me while I was over there with them, "Gee, I can't wait, boss, to get back out there and get stuck into it. It was really exciting the other day." I think to myself: What is it that drives these young people to want to put themselves in danger? Do you know what? Sometimes it can just be youthful exuberance backed up with a genuine desire to support their mates and to show that they are the best they can be in their chosen profession. That is admirable.

The fellow I interviewed, Paul Lawrence, the former firefighter, worked in stations such as Perth, Maddington, Claremont and Kwinana, plus he spent one to six months in relieving duties throughout his career in all stations across Western Australia, both in rural areas and metropolitan Perth. He said to me that on any given day when his station was called to an emergency, he faced any or all of the possible dangers that I mentioned when I first stood to speak tonight. I will say again: those dangers could involve entering confined spaces that contain toxic fumes or water, or that could be about to collapse. They could also include working at heights; working over water with heavy equipment; trying to put out grass or structural fires; trying to put out vehicle fires; trying to save people from vehicle accidents or people who have been crushed in vehicles; and, of course, dealing with hazardous materials such as chemical spills. In addition to this, he faced the awful but necessary task of body retrieval, and he mentioned some of the incidents in which he had to do this, be it a person who had been killed by a train, a person who had been burnt in a building, or a person who had been killed in a car crash. It highlighted for me just how stressful the job of being a young firefighter, man or woman, could be, given that on any particular day those are the types of dangers that they face. Suffice it to say that it is clearly a stressful job.

Paul Lawrence, the fellow I interviewed, has thousands of examples of dangerous encounters in the line of duty. One particular example that he recalled was a fire that took place in the dementia wing of an aged-care facility. Paul and his colleague—his mate—went in and did multiple rescues of people who were bedridden and suffered from dementia. In addition to saving a number of lives, they also unfortunately recovered two deceased people. The dangers that they faced there were fire, falling structures and toxic gases and fumes, and it is those toxic gases and fumes that we readily relate to the issue we are talking about today in this place. Even though Paul and his colleagues wore breathing apparatus, because of the nature of the work they were doing, they had to take their breathing apparatus off to replace new oxygen tanks and so on. Whilst this was happening outside the burning building, the fumes, as one would expect, were in the air around them.

As members can imagine, this exposes firefighters to air that may contain carcinogens. Paul does not have cancer; he has not contracted cancer, and I hope he never does. However, he did reflect on some of his colleagues—one who he said was very young and who contracted cancer—and he also mentioned a couple of others. He said that it seemed unusual for these extremely fit young people in his industry to contract cancer.

So what do we do about this? What we as policymakers should always do is ensure that we provide our brave firefighters with the best equipment, procedures, training and leadership they can possibly have so that, although we acknowledge that it is part of their job to do dangerous things, we can ensure that they are best equipped, best trained and best led so that when they do those dangerous things, minimal harm will come to them. However, sometimes that harm may be unavoidable.

What we have been talking about today is to support them when, with all of the above in mind, they risk their lives to save the lives of others but, through no fault of their own, they may expose themselves to carcinogenic substances. Implementing policies that are just and right is a noble cause, and we need to make sure that we get this policy right.

I bring members back to the notion of rebuttable presumption. If firefighters, in the course of their duty, are at a later date found to have contracted a scheduled cancer, an assumption is taken that the cancer was caused by their service, unless proved otherwise. Therefore, compensation would need to be made available to support the firefighter or the ex-firefighter who is ill and therefore also supporting their family. This is noble. We need to get this legislation right.

We must ensure that the policy is robust, that we thrash out any secondary and tertiary consequences and that it is right for our firefighters so that they are looked after, not only while they are serving as a firefighter, but also long after they have ceased being a firefighter.

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MR M.H. TAYLOR (Bateman) [6.30 pm]: I rise this evening in support of local firefighters and firefighters across the state. The electorate of Bateman is blessed to have a very good fire station, the Murdoch Fire Station, which was opened on 21 September 2005. There are four platoons, or shifts as they call them, with eight to 13 firefighters on each shift, with a total of 52 firefighters. They range in service from a few years to over 25 years. They say that they are called out to two to three incidents per shift. In summer that is most commonly bushfires and at other times it is traffic incidents, structural fires, chemical fires, suicides and special services.

Upon reading this motion yesterday, I made an effort to visit this fire station just before lunch today; in fact, it was the reason I was late to the chamber today. I thought it was important to talk to the local firefighters in my electorate and hear from them firsthand how they are being influenced and the stories that they have relating to this motion. I start by saying what an impressive group of people they are. I got to meet with 10 firefighters today. There was one lady and nine gentlemen ranging in age and service from a couple of years right through to about 25 years. When I asked them whether they knew of colleagues who had been diagnosed with cancer, they rattled off an amazing number of names straightaway. They instantly knew of many colleagues who had been affected by cancer. One lady, Kim, had been a firefighter for 10 years. Five years into her service, she contracted cancer. She battled that cancer and overcame it, eventually going into remission. It later returned. She is now overseas trying to get treatment subsequent to the treatment that she received previously. The impact that this has had on her family is massive. It is life changing not just to her but to her family. It was really quite heartening to hear her colleagues talking about her story and the support that they had for her, including holding a football match to help raise some money.

They also mentioned a fellow named Gavin, who they said was incredibly fit. He was a non-smoker and a non-drinker, yet he contracted lung cancer. As a result of contracting lung cancer, he left his job in the service. This is not an uncommon situation according to these firefighters. Their attitude was quite incredible, despite knowing that there are so many examples of colleagues who have cancer and who are fighting danger. Even though they know that they are not totally protected when they do their job, they still accept the risks of their job. Their dedication to service is just outstanding. It is quite amazing and unlike most situations that we would be aware of. They think about and talk about the health risks after every job and sometimes during the job. They will have a pre-job discussion about what is ahead, although a lot of the time it is uncertain. They are aware of and talk about the risks of their job essentially all day, every day when the conversations are mapped together.

They commented on safety equipment. They commented on suggestions to reduce the health risks to each other. They even gave examples of when they were in a truck driving back from a job and one commented that the safety gear of somebody smelt of toxins or a pollutant that warranted it being removed from the cab of the truck. They live with these risks every single day and they talk about it every single day, yet, despite that, they are super-keen about their job. When I asked them whether they would have started this career path if they had known about these unforeseen risks and the uncertainty associated with the impacts of the risks, every one of them said yes. It was quite extraordinary.

It is not just the firefighters who are affected by these complications and diagnoses; it is also their families. This does not affect just firefighters; it affects the wives, the husbands, the children and the parents. It affects everyone. The flow-on consequence of that throughout our community is big.

They talked about headaches from fighting bushfires, but not due to dehydration. They said that they are full of fluid, yet they still get a headache at night from fighting a bushfire, presumably as a result of the unforeseen gases. They talked about coughing up substances in the shower after a job. Safety has improved to the point now at which they take showers after each job to try to remove pollutants from their skin and to be as clean as they can after fighting a fire. They will regularly cough up and remove from their sinuses particles from the fire that they have just fought. Chemical exposure is not just through the eyes, the nose and the mouth; it is also through the skin, especially parts of the neck, the skin on which they say becomes quite thin from rubbing against their safety gear throughout their career.

The fear of contracting work-related illnesses is a genuine concern. They know that an abnormally large proportion of people get sick. John, for example, has worked for over 20 years in the fire service and he would have no idea what he has been exposed to over those years—a multitude of chemicals, not just in volume but in duration and type. We all know that the level of these chemicals is unable to be tested. When somebody enters a fire, they do not know what range or level of chemicals they will be exposed to or exactly how long they will be exposed to them. It is not like a workplace where there is a known hazard and there are systems in place to deal with it. There might be appropriate breathing apparatus if there is a known gas, or there might be safety clothing that will protect people from a certain chemical in a manufacturing industry or a heavy industry. In these situations, the chemicals are monitored and people are aware of their exposures and they are managed. Firefighters go into fires often not knowing exactly what is in the air. They do not know what chemicals they

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might be exposed to, the duration they will be exposed to the chemicals or the effect that the chemicals will have on them.

They know that safety is improving, but so, too, is the complexity of the fires that they fight. One of the conversations we had was about a firefighter who remembers in the old days going in to fight a fire wearing essentially black cotton pants and a woollen jumper. He said that he feels a little spoilt with the new gear and protection. He is grateful for the improvements, but he realises that the risks have increased at a rate that is at least equal to the improvement in the quality of the safety gear.

It is not just the risks. There is also the stress of fighting a fire. One of my good friends, Paul, is a fireman and in fact sometimes works at Murdoch Fire Station. I remember from talking to Paul that he said that after the first fire that he fought, he required some counselling, just because of the mental stress that is put on people who fight fires. Therefore, on top of the chemical risk, there are the psychological stresses that are placed on firefighters.

That is why we need to support firefighters by taking the onus away from them in the event that there is a diagnosis of a known cancer from that field. I do not think we should require firefighters to prove that their cancer is related to a specific fire or to their work function. We should respect the role that they play in our society and admire their acceptance of the risks that they face daily in what they do. We should be assisting them by not requiring them to fight potential litigation. Their whole focus should be on dealing with the cancer, seeking treatment, comforting family, and recovery. For that reason, I am fully supportive of the Liberal campaign commitment to support firefighters by removing the onus from them.

Dr A.D. Buti: We brought the motion in! Support us! Say that we have done a good job!

Mr M.H. TAYLOR: It is also a Liberal campaign commitment that I am fully supportive of.

Dr A.D. Buti: We are the ones who brought it to Parliament!

Mr M.H. TAYLOR: The member is not disagreeing with what I said.

Dr A.D. Buti: Give credit where credit is due!

Mr M.H. TAYLOR: I am. I am giving credit to the Liberal Party for its campaign commitment to ensure that we remove the onus from firefighters.

Dr A.D. Buti: Amazing! Just amazing! Unbelievable!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr I.M. Britza): Thank you, members!

Mr M.H. TAYLOR: I think the focus should be on treatment. We should respect and appreciate the amazing attitude of firefighters, despite the high risks and the uncertainty that they work under, and the Aussie spirit with which they tackle their jobs on a daily basis.

MR P.T. MILES (Wanneroo — Parliamentary Secretary) [6.40 pm]: As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Commerce, I want to make some brief comments. WorkCover is the agency that will be amending the WorkCover legislation to accommodate this process that we are talking about tonight. I want to acknowledge all the members who have spoken on this motion tonight. I also want to acknowledge the fact that the member for Girrawheen did bring on this legislation in February 2012. The previous Minister for Commerce, Hon Troy Buswell, and the Premier have acknowledged that, to the extent that in October last year this government gave a commitment, as the member for Girrawheen stated earlier tonight, we would bring on this legislation as soon as practicable after the state election on 9 March. Of course we are dealing with that. The Minister for Commerce, Hon Michael Mischin, is dealing with that legislation right now, and it is going through a couple of drafts.

I do not think anybody in this house would say no to our courageous firefighters. This is legislation that every member will need to look at seriously when it comes before the house in the next few weeks or so. I think this legislation should pass through this house quite effectively and efficiently, and I would hope and trust that there is no sort of stunt behaviour whereby every member wants to talk for 30 minutes on the bill, because that will hold it up. But I do not think the member for Girrawheen will do anything like that.

I also want to acknowledge that every member who has spoken on this motion has spoken true words and has done very well. Presumptive legislation is something that the government is very, very committed to, and we will be bringing it to the house as soon as is practicable.

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Emergency Services) [6.43 pm]: Member for Girrawheen, I suspect that we are all in furious agreement on the necessity for this piece of legislation and in understanding the urgency of it. We obviously agree on the principle of giving firefighters the benefit of the doubt—firefighters who risk their lives on a daily basis so that if our house is burning and our family is in danger and we call 000, they come. They come in big red trucks; they come in white trucks; they come in all kinds of devices, and they put their lives on the line to protect our assets, our lives and our families.

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What we are basically agreeing on is the principle that if they contract or develop a cancer due to exposure at their workplace, as I said, we will have their backs and give them the benefit of the doubt. We have to keep in mind that unlike in a lot of other workforces and workplaces, but a lot like the police and the military, people who choose to become firefighters and people who are selected to undertake firefighter training are generally younger and generally much fitter, which is why the workplace injury statistics for firefighters in the first five years of their career seem to be very low, even though the dangers are very high. These people run up ladders with hoses over their back, they lift heavy things, and they walk through burning buildings. They are exposed to heat, to carnage and, unfortunately, also to death. So, we have to be very aware of the risks they take, and if they are contracting and developing certain cancers at a faster rate than the rest of the population, we have to give them the benefit of the doubt that it is essentially a workplace-related injury. When people do develop a cancer, the last thing they need to do is fight a protracted legal battle to prove that it was a workplace-related injury. Of course, we support this motion wholeheartedly.

The government made a commitment to introduce presumptive legislation for firefighters, and we are doing that. We will do that as soon as possible, as quickly as possible, and I expect that members will see the results of that in the very, very near future. So, let me assure the house that, as the Minister for Emergency Services, I am very committed to that, and also the Minister for Commerce and the government as a whole are committed to undertaking that task.

For the information of the member for Girrawheen, obviously, as the member highlighted in her opening speech, there will have to be two tranches of this legislation. Permanent firefighters are obviously covered by workplace injury rules that are different from those covering volunteers. The intention is, of course, to look after the career firefighters first, and then the volunteers and their injuries—not only the development of cancers, but also injuries generally—in a second round of legislation. That is not to say that we in any way accept that they are less important. Of course, they are just as important because, as a volunteer firefighter still myself, I know that they will still go out there and do the job.

Ms M.M. Quirk: It's a drafting technicality, basically.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Essentially, one is a much more difficult job, and we do not want to delay the process for career firefighters because of the drafting requirements of essentially a far more complicated issue.

I also note my appreciation of, friendship with and support for Kevin Jolly and Steve Matthews from the United Firefighters Union. They have provided me frank and fearless advice on this and a number of different issues. I enjoy their company, and I think it is worth noting, as other members have noted, the contribution that the UFU has made to bringing this issue to the attention of governments all around the country. In fact, interestingly, last Tuesday, I believe, similar legislation was introduced into the Tasmanian Parliament. I am not sure whether the member for Girrawheen has seen that, but it is worth having a look at how the Tasmanian Parliament is approaching this issue as well. Nationally, the UFU has highlighted this issue in a number of jurisdictions, and obviously they are moving to address it as quickly as possible, as we are in Western Australia.

Having said all that, as we are in furious agreement, I would like to move an amendment to the member for Girrawheen's motion.

Amendment to Motion

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I move —

To insert after “employment” —

, and notes that the Ministers for Commerce and Emergency Services are expediting the process

That is simply acknowledgement that we agree on this, we are working on it and we are trying to get it done as quickly as possible.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [6.49 pm]: I rise to say a few brief words in support of the motion. It certainly gives me great pleasure, as a former Minister for Police and Emergency Services for a five-year period, to support the member for Girrawheen's motion. I also acknowledge the amendment moved by the Minister for Emergency Services and signal that the opposition will support his amendment. Hopefully, that will be the basis for the government supporting the member for Girrawheen's motion, with the minister's amendment incorporated.

Some very fine words have been said tonight, most of which I wholeheartedly agree with. As has been noted, it is a year since the member for Girrawheen introduced a bill into this house that could have done the job. The government said that it would look at this legislation and that it was important to get it right. I agree—it is important to get it right, but I fail to see why it should take longer than a year. It is a fine truism that justice

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delayed is justice denied. Further delay on this legislation will deny firefighters the protection that they need and that they need now. I note that the minister's amendment states that he and the Minister for Commerce are expediting this legislation. I certainly hope so. I note that another member said that they hoped that once the legislation came to the house, perhaps it could take a long time or it could be progressed quickly. I signal here and now on behalf of the opposition that we would give this legislation priority and we would deal with it quickly. I see no reason this could not be law by the middle of this year. If the minister brings the legislation to the house, we are prepared to see that legislation get the highest priority. We will speak briefly and concisely on it in order to pass it through this house and send it to the other house so that it can become law and firefighters can have the protection that they deserve. We need more than words. It is fine to stand here tonight and talk the talk, but the time has come to walk the walk and give firefighters the protection that they deserve, and to give it to them now.

Minister, we await that legislation and we await the opportunity to universally support that legislation and make it law as soon as possible. I see no reason why, come the middle of this year, firefighters should still be waiting for the justice that they so richly deserve.

Amendment put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

Question put and passed.

House adjourned at 6.53 pm
