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# The numbers have it Premier

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A KEY reason Labor won the Queensland election in January was the promise to rebuild the institutions of accountability and transparency.

Since taking office, the Palaszczuk Government has made down payments on this promise, including: reducing the disclosure threshold on political donations, returning powers to parliament's Speaker, establishing an open process for appointing the Crime and Corruption Commission chairman and chief executive, and using an independent panel to appoint directors-general of government departments.

But in a key area of this agenda Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk (below) is allowing populism to trump reasoned debate. That area is the number of politicians and their roles.

In this regard the Premier resembles the French politician in the 1848 revolution who allegedly chased after an angry mob shouting at bystanders "let me through, I have to follow them, I'm their leader".

Shadow Attorney-General Ian Walker has proposed the independent Electoral and Administrative Review Commission be allowed to decide if Queensland's Parliament should be

increased from 89 MPs to 94. Parliament was last expanded in 1985 when there were only 2.5 million people in Queensland. There are 4.8 million today.

For an international comparison with another sub-national government, Scotland's population is only slightly larger than Queensland's but its devolved Parliament has 129 members (and a Cabinet of 25).

Central to representation, good government and accountability is that voters have access to MPs, that politicians have time to research and consider policies, and that they have time to take a close interest in their electorates. In real terms there has been a substantial decline in representation over recent decades, which the LNP's modest proposal only starts to reverse.

Yet the Premier immediately slapped down the LNP's idea with the populist "the

last thing Queenslanders want is more politicians".

This response to expanding Parliament has a strong flavour of the anti-politician election promise that Labor would slash the size of Cabinet to 14 ministers.

Since the surprise win, the Premier has stuck with it despite clear evidence the reduction isn't working (though when asked last week she refused to rule out increasing the size of

Cabinet later this year). But everyone knows ministers (many with no experience) are overburdened with multiple portfolios. Policy development is slow, important issues only get dealt with as they become urgent and stakeholders find it near impossible to get time in ministerial diaries. The Government and Opposition should work together to review the size of Parliament and have a measured debate about it. The parties should be willing to jointly sell the benefits if needed. They also need to agree that Cabinet needs returning to full strength and make that change immediately. Institutional rebuilding is of real importance to Queensland's future as a prosperous and open society. The reforms need strong leadership; short-term populist promises can be costly to good government, transparency and accountability.

In 1774 the conservative political philosopher and sometime MP, Edmund Burke, told voters "your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it" to public opinion.

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