



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

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ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—ONP) (10.33 p.m.): I rise to speak to the motion moved by the member for Warwick. One Nation's Electoral Amendment Bill is a Bill that we were extremely proud to introduce into this House. We are proud on behalf of all Australians who voted for us and supported us as we are fulfilling a promise to them. We are proud on behalf of all candidates who felt the injustice of the electoral system through the deception of others. We are proud on behalf of all Queenslanders who believe in what is right, honest and fair and who are sick of being deceived by the people for whom they wish they could have respect.

This Bill saddens me also because I do not feel that postponing what could have been a very good and lively debate tonight is the way to go. With respect to the motion moved by the member for Warwick, I think it is probably a good thing to refer this Bill to LCARC. I cast no doubt at all over the integrity of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. It is an all-party committee of the House. There is even a One Nation member on that committee. It is really good to see that it is fully representative of the whole of the House and has an independent, which gives the committee far more credibility.

When I first heard the motion of the member for Warwick, I thought it might have been a stalling tactic to postpone the debate. However, when the report from LCARC eventually comes back, it will probably render a lot of good for an even more lively debate, especially on hearing some of the things that have been said here tonight about electoral reform and truth in political advertising. I have come to the realisation that this could, in fact, be a good thing for a Bill such as this. In fact, a similar Bill in a slightly different form has been brought to this Parliament before.

I know that the Honourable the Attorney-General outlined his concerns at the beginning of the debate and gave support to the motion moved by the member for Warwick. With the motion having the majority support of the House, it would be pointless to bring on a full debate against it. In hindsight I am sure that it will be seen to be a good thing. Later on next year when the report is returned by LCARC, it will be important to address the areas of electoral reform, especially truth in political advertising. As I said before, these concerns have been brought to the House before. Although the second-reading debate has been stalled tonight, I know that this is only a minor hiccup before its full debate in the House.

It is a pleasure to see some of the country members get up and talk about elections, the size of their electorates and the problems and troubles that they face. EARC actually brought in a lot of reforms, especially in relation to boundaries and community of interest. When one sees the large size of some of those electorates, it is quite amazing that there can be any form of community of interest from one corner of them to the other. That there is any community of interest is amazing, especially when the channels of communication and the routes of travel do not always flow in convenient directions.

Even in my own electorate of Caboolture the boundaries have been split. It has now been cut down the middle in time for the next election. Some may find it surprising that a community of interest is implied between Conondale and Caboolture. In fact, the people of Conondale have more in common with the Nambour area, which is in the electorate of Nicklin. What really happened is that some people

just went through a map of the State with a pin and touched little boxes and decided, "Hey, there are 700 people here and there are 1,000 people here." At the end of the day they added them up and said, "Wow, we have come up with the right number", and did not take into account community of interest.

The member for Kurwongbah has come up into what is now the corner of my electorate. She spoke at the Farmers Hall at Caboolture and gave a pretty good address on the Labor Party. I do not know whether that interested too many people up there, but it was certainly of interest to see her come up there and talk.

Mrs Lavarch: It would amaze you how many people were members of the Labor Party.

Mr FELDMAN: It would amaze me up at Caboolture; it certainly would.

Mrs Lavarch: I will give you their names.

Mr FELDMAN: That would be very good.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: When I went up to Longreach for the Year of the Outback the other weekend, I did not actually get a chance to catch up with the member for Gregory for a drink perhaps in the Welcome Home Hotel. However, I assure him that the next time I am up there I certainly will.

I will return to the amendment moved by the member for Warwick and One Nation's Electoral Amendment Bill. We have already heard from our colleagues about the number of reports that have been done on the issue and the number of times it has been mentioned in Parliament, promised by politicians and referred to in legal judgments. We have heard the coalition's attempt to make improvements to truth in political advertising provisions, but that legislation lapsed. In fact, it took 400,000 Queenslanders to say that they had had enough before a party in this House would put those they represent above themselves and present this legislation.

We heard of the promises made to the people of Queensland by both sides of the House. We have read about the Labor Party's complaint of the failure of the coalition Government to act upon a promise in Hansard. We heard the coalition making the same complaints about Labor. We have clearly displayed the inaction of both sides of this House in regard to getting a Bill such as this up for debate and getting it through all stages.

We have gone over the completely unacceptable acts of deception that occurred in the 1998 State election as revealed in the subsequent findings of the Hon. Justice McKenzie, who found that the false how-to-vote cards were used, distributed and designed in a manner to deliberately mislead and deceive voters into believing that it was a One Nation how-to-vote card. The alarming aspect though is that, as further stated by the learned judge, under the present legislation what took place was technically legal. It might not have been moral, but it was technically legal.

We have gone over some of the recommendations of many of the reports and inquires conducted on truth in political advertising, and we note their similarity. We have explained how the Electoral Amendment Bill achieves—and I am sure that LCARC will come to the same conclusion—the aims of these reports and repairs the loopholes in our Electoral Act pointed out in Justice McKenzie's judgment.

We have heard several members talk of the high esteem in which the South Australian legislation is held. It has faced a legal challenge and survived and has set standards for other Australian jurisdictions. We have shown how the One Nation Electoral Amendment Bill is based on that South Australian legislation but improves upon some of its aspects.

From the evidence outlined by my colleagues throughout this debate to the motion moved by the member for Warwick, there is no valid reason why this Bill should not receive support from both sides and from LCARC. The Bill provides a strong deterrent against misleading and deceiving electoral advertising. It provides for increased penalties for those who breach the provisions and it catches executive officers of political organisations should they have played a role in deceiving the public.

If members are doing the right thing by their electorates, then there is no justification at all for any form of cheating; they will be elected on their merits. What we have seen in this country and in this State is a systematic and consistent abuse of that electoral system by the major parties in their struggle for more power at the expense of democracy, representation and respect for the citizens of Queensland. If members of this House were here for the right reasons and attempting with all honesty and integrity to do their best for their electorates, there would be no reason why the entire electoral process should not be completely watertight against any form of deceptive action or misleading information. The fact that it is not is an indictment of politicians who have gone before us and is a contributing factor to the low self-esteem in which politicians are currently held.

Isn't it better to win and to win fairly than to cheat to win? The use of the false how-to-vote cards was inexcusable; it was nothing more than an attempt to prey upon public confusion and ignorance of electorate matters. It was a case of cheating to win. When we see a lot of the things that go on, it is little wonder that Queensland has become cynical, as has already been said in this debate. For example, we saw cynicism over net bet. It is no wonder the public is disgusted with the actions of politicians. The last thing they deserve is to be taken for a ride at election time with untruths and deceit.

Government members interjected

Mr FELDMAN: I hear members of this House carrying on, just as they did on the night when we debated the Community Based Referendum Bill. The reason they do this is that they have no valid arguments against the Bill. Even though it is to be referred to LCARC, they know that it is something that they themselves should have introduced. Perhaps the all-party members of LCARC will find ways to improve the Bill before it comes back for debate once again.

Members know that they have done some wrong, have misused their power and treated the people of Queensland—the people whom they are supposed to represent—with absolute disdain at election time. I say this to all members of the Government and the coalition: members really have to watch their consciences. Do they die throughout the preselection process, or does it take a bit longer than that—when members turn their backs on their electorates or beliefs and vote on party lines in this House that do not really represent the wishes of their communities.

We have heard the Government and the coalition attempt to argue that we do not need the people's input through community based referendums because the parliamentary system and the party system ensure representation and democracy. The Government mentions referendums and four-year terms. Yet if CBR had got through when we debated it, perhaps we really would have had citizens being truly represented and well represented in this Parliament.

The people of Queensland deserve to be treated with respect and honesty. This Bill, which will be referred to LCARC, ensures that during an election campaign self-interested people cannot mislead or deceive the public with their political advertising or their how-to-vote cards. My One Nation colleagues have already mentioned the fact that the coalition and Labor Party made a joint promise some years ago to ensure truth in political advertising. Yet, to this stage, they have done nothing to make sure that this has happened. This alone poses a question to the public about the roles of the major parties and their effectiveness of representing the will of the people and keeping their promises.

It took One Nation to stand up for the interests of Queensland and this legislation. As I said at the beginning, the Bill's referral to LCARC has stalled its progress somewhat. We hope that the Bill comes back in a way that is more acceptable so that it may be well received by everyone in this place and accepted. We believe that that will happen. We hope that, when it comes back, there is no vote against the Bill, as occurred with the Bill of the member for Thuringowa.

Any vote against this Bill will certainly not be because it is bad for Queenslanders at all, because it is not. It is a good Bill that will benefit the people. Perhaps it is because One Nation has introduced it. Perhaps it is because members are aware that, if they were truly honest with the public, many of them may not have their jobs. Perhaps it is because they are afraid that they may not win if they play fairly and honestly. Perhaps it is because they are simply too arrogant to see beyond the ivory tower they live in. I am sure the people of Queensland will come to their own conclusions at the next election.

One Nation's Electoral Amendment Bill will benefit the people of Queensland. It is workable and it is necessary to ensure that the electoral process is of the highest standard possible to achieve democratic elections and the selection of worthwhile representatives for the people of this State. I say that it is workable and it is necessary to ensure that our electoral process is of the highest standard. I say to the people of Queensland that, based on the facts, not fiction, they should decide who represents them. They should decide on the actions of those who vote against this Bill when it comes back from LCARC. Then constituents will see their political aspirants who are supposed to be representing them in a different light, because they will be voting down legislation that is of benefit to this State and of benefit to the electoral process.

I look forward to receiving the report from LCARC. All I can say is that, when political parties run campaigns, the voting public should really look at whom they can trust throughout that campaign and how the campaign has been run. I went around to every single booth in the Caboolture electorate on election day. It was quite reprehensible to see the way in which a lot of the advertising was done. In a sense, it was because of the public's indictment of the way they saw their representatives campaign for election that the vote went the way it did at the last election.

I spent only a minor amount of time compared with that spent by the other parties in Caboolture. I just think the result was a sign of the times. People were saying that they were really sick of the manner in which a lot of the election advertising was conducted.

In closing, I recommend that this Bill be referred to the LCARC. I pray that it brings the Bill back in a manner that is acceptable to the whole of the House, as it is a representative committee of the

whole of the House, and that this legislation does receive the support it should get from both sides of this House. Both sides have been talking about this for a very long time and it is about time this matter was addressed. Truth in advertising, especially political advertising, needs to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed urgently.

I support the motion moved by the member for Warwick. I have no problems with the Bill going to the LCARC. The Bill should come back in a form that is truly acceptable to the whole of the House. I thank the member for Warwick for moving the motion.
