



Speech by  
**Hon. BRIAN  
LITTLEPROUD**

**MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS**

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Hansard 1 December 1999

**ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL**

**Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD** (Western Downs—NPA) (8.56 p.m.): I second the amendment moved by the honourable member for Warwick. Traditionally, in our contributions during debates on Bills, members can speak on a wide range of issues. Tonight, I want to say some things that I do not often get the opportunity to say. I represent a part of Queensland that, in western terminology, has just been put in the back paddock. Through the redistribution that occurred recently under the Electoral Act, the people whom I represent have been transferred from an electorate that is located within three and a half hours' drive from Brisbane to an electorate that stretches from about two and a half hours' drive from Brisbane right down to the South Australian border. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to appeal to the fair-mindedness of people, especially the noted civil libertarian of Queensland, the Attorney-General, to think about the consequences of actions taken in recent years.

I came into this House in 1983. At that time, all of those people who were tied in with the ALP movement—be they politicians, people in the press, or academics—went all out to gain political advantage by talking about one vote, one value.

**Mr FOLEY:** I rise to a point of order.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** Do not be so sensitive.

**Mr FOLEY:** I appreciate the honourable member's concern in this area, but the amendment that the member for Warwick moved relates to a referral of this Bill to the all-party committee.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Nelson-Carr): Do you wish him to withdraw?

**Mr FOLEY:** No, no, I am simply drawing the attention of the Chair to the question of relevance.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** Of course, I want the Bill referred, but I want them to consider what I am saying as well.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you. You are honouring the long tradition of this House by allowing a free-ranging debate. The first law officer of the State, who is a great defender of the freedom of speech, is taking some sort of point of order.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** There is no need to waste my time. I should be allowed to continue.

**Mr Sullivan** interjected.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** The member should go back to the Christian Brothers and I will stick with what I am doing in representing the people of Western Downs.

This movement had success and, since then, people have basked in the glory and, for most of that time, power has rested with the ALP. I just want to let the people of this House know the way in which that has impacted on the people whom I represent. In 1983 I was elected to this House to represent the seat of Condamine. The electorate was home to 13,000 people and covered 13,000 or 14,000 square kilometres. I could drive across my electorate in an hour and a half. The electorate covered something like three local governments, about 15 or 20 schools and six or seven communities.

In 1992 the electoral boundaries were redistributed and the new seat of Western Downs was formed. I was successful in winning that seat. All of a sudden I had to represent 23,000 people, which

was an increase of almost 50% on the numbers in my old seat. The electorate now covers 40,000 square kilometres. It takes about five hours to drive across the electorate and about three hours to drive to Parliament. I can tell members that the impact of that redistribution on the people whom I represent has been unbelievable. Within my electorate there are now seven local authorities, about 14 or 15 different towns, seven different show societies and 30 different schools. My constituents have been prepared to put up with that.

I had been told by various members on the opposite side of the House that the rights and the privileges of the electors in terms of access to their State member would be looked after because there is a great phone service, a fax service, a free 1800 phone number and I would have more staff. However, I do not have any more staff to work in my electorate office. The people whom I represent are losing out.

Following the last redistribution, my electorate included the entire Chinchilla Shire. Chinchilla is three hours' drive from Brisbane. However, one can drive another 13 hours to the South Australian border and still be in my electorate. It is for that reason that I say that we have been put in the back paddock. This is an ideal opportunity to appeal to some of the people on the other side of House, who pride themselves on being civil libertarians—

**Mr Fenlon:** Do you want to go back to the gerrymander under Joh?

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** We need some sort of zonal consideration.

**Mr Fenlon** interjected.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** The member raised the issue. Let us go back to the very home of the Westminster system, the United Kingdom, where electorates include suburbs of London and rural areas of Scotland. There is a greater diversification of people in those electorates than would ever be considered in Australia, but in the United Kingdom there is no criticism of the variation in enrolments. The same thing applies in Canada, which also has an electoral system that is based on the Westminster system.

The member for Greenslopes was raised in the west, but now he sits on the bitumen. He is happy to take all the benefits for the city and completely ignore the rights of rural people. Every three or four weeks, I visit the rural towns in my electorate and I know that the people are angry because they do not have access to the Government. Those people say to me, "I haven't seen you for six weeks. You can't be doing anything." They would not know how hard I work. The member for Greenslopes, who claims to be a product of the west, sits on the bitumen and is critical of the system. He wants it changed to his political advantage.

I appeal to the fair-minded people of the House—not the member for Greenslopes—to take a good look at the situation of electoral boundaries. Just this week a report to the Local Government of Association was released, which stated that the divide between the people of the cities and the inland is widening and that the prospects for the future are not too good. All of a sudden, people such as the Attorney-General, the member for Greenslopes and some of their academic mates are jumping up and down, trying to convince us that their argument is correct while their only motivation is political advantage. At the moment they hold the upper hand. However, what they are doing is pushing people who live only two and a half hours to three hours inland from Brisbane into the back paddock. Those people are unfairly disadvantaged.

The Minister for Primary Industries is a fair-minded man.

**Mr Fenlon:** Have you checked this with Dr Watson?

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** I could not care less what Dr Watson thinks, because, like the member opposite, he is on the bitumen. I represent the people of the Western Downs, but most of my electorate will be handed over to the electorate of Warrego. This bloke from the bitumen at Greenslopes thinks that he knows the lot! I appeal to the people in the House and, through the forum of the House, to the people of Queensland to have some regard for what has been done in the past decade in terms of electoral inequity in Queensland.

I am retiring. I will not contest the next election, but I feel for the people whom I represent and I feel for those people—

**Honourable members** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! The shouting is making it impossible for me to hear anything. Members from both sides will cease and desist.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The member for Greenslopes does himself no credit. For a bloke who takes pride in being reared in the inland, he shows little sensitivity for what is being forced upon the people whom I represent.

I am resigning from this place, not for any personal benefit but for the benefit of the people whom I represent. The people of Mitchell and areas further west are already resigned to the fact that

they are in the back paddock and are almost ignored by Government. I am speaking up for the people of the Chinchilla, Murilla, Bendemere and Bungil Shires and the Roma Town Council. All of a sudden, people who have had representation and thought that they were pretty well in touch with mainstream Queensland have been put in the back paddock. Those people are part of an electorate that covers well over 40,000 square kilometres. It is impossible for those people to have reasonable access to their member. It is impossible for the member—and I hope it will be Howard Hobbs—to represent those people properly. Despite this, people on the other side of House will support the next redistribution because of the political advantage that it will give them at election time.

I appeal to the better nature of people opposite, and ask them to understand that their argument is not unique to Queensland. In the United Kingdom, there are greater variations in population between the seats in the remote parts of Scotland and those in the suburbs of London than has ever been complained of in Queensland. The same thing applies in Canada. The representatives of those electorates have a sense of justice. They understand that the people living in remote areas need consideration. However, because of the political advantage that the Labor Party desperately wanted in the late eighties, the redistribution succeeded. The academics and the press picked up the cause and the Labor Party won the day. However, under this redistribution, the State of Queensland will be the loser.

I will say something to make members opposite buck up. The Premier has suggested that Queensland should be divided into two time zones. The Premier jumps up and down about the State of Origin and talks about how great Queensland is. However, he is suggesting that we should cut off the south-east corner of Queensland and put it in the same time zone as Sydney and Melbourne. I remind him that we are Queenslanders first.

**Mr Lucas:** Robert Hill and John Howard.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** You windbag. Get your feet out of the salt water, go inland and find out what it is all about. You would not know what you are talking about.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member where he is. He will address his points through the Chair.

**Mr FOLEY:** I rise to a point of order. This is irrelevant to the matter before the Chamber. The honourable member is digressing into matters that are entirely irrelevant to the questions before this Chamber.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Does the Attorney-General wish something to be withdrawn? There is no point of order.

**Mr LITTLEPROUD:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I admire your rulings and your understanding of the procedures of this House. I am bruising the ego of the civil libertarian who is Queensland's first law officer. I appeal to the people of Queensland. Maybe I will touch a raw nerve with some members. The member for Greenslopes and the member for Lytton—who has his feet in the salty water—should understand that the Government is doing a great disservice to the people of Queensland. I happen to represent some of the people of Queensland who are being disadvantaged. We should remember this the next time that the issue of electoral boundaries is debated. This Minister has the chance to do something about the situation, but he will not because of the political advantage that the Government stands to gain.

The Minister should consider just how the redistribution will disadvantage the people whom I represent when my electorate is incorporated into the already vast electorate of Warrego. It takes two and a half hours to drive to the Warrego electorate from Brisbane and it takes 20 hours to drive across it. Something has to be done. If the Minister does not do something about it, it will be a shame for the people of Queensland.

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