



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 17 August 1999

INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (9.20 p.m.): After listening for the best part of 20 minutes to rambling reminiscences, I am surprised to find that I agree with the last few comments that were made by the member for Crows Nest. Indeed, in relation to the matter that we are debating, the spotlight is on all members of this House. These are difficult times. It will become apparent to the public tomorrow and in the days succeeding that in this matter the member for Crows Nest and, it would appear, other members opposite, are indeed the ones who are walking away—dancing around the edges, bunging on a show—from legislation that in conscience they should be supporting. For 20 minutes we listened to the member for Crows Nest, and during that time he did not deal with the legislation that we are hoping will be passed tonight. Instead of dealing with the contents of the Bill, he rambled on around the edges. He made no excuse for walking away from legislation that every honourable member in this House who has any kind of integrity should be supporting. The member for Crows Nest dared to suggest that the spotlight from the media and from the public is on members to see who is going to take a strong stance on this matter. That is happening already.

With our Premier, Peter Beattie, I am indeed pleased to be part of a team that has taken such strong action already. Even when there had been no allegation of illegality or impropriety, the Premier and the Treasurer called immediately for an investigation into the process by the Auditor-General. That action is in complete contrast to the interference by the coalition Government with the CJC investigation into the secret memorandum of understanding. In relation to this matter, the Auditor-General and the CJC will be able to operate in complete freedom and with every cooperation from the Government. Urgent action was taken by the Beattie Government to ensure that three members of the Labor Party involved in public life do not benefit from their positions as minor shareholders in a company that has an interest in the company awarded the licence. The Premier has an open attitude, providing regular information freely, clearly and firmly to all members of the public. If words are not enough, we have offered to the House this legislation. All members of this House have the opportunity to put their money where their mouths are and vote for this legislation that says, "We are not just saying it, we really mean it." That is what this legislation is really about.

There could not be a stronger response or more reassurance to people who are understandably tired of politicians who put self-interest ahead of community interest. Understandably, people are untrusting of such politicians, who find it easy to make statements. Instead, by introducing legislation to redress the situation and to protect against the same situation arising again, we have put before them our sincere efforts and our integrity.

Even the Leader of the Opposition—a former Premier of this State—danced around, put on a show and ignored the content of this legislation. He played theatrical politics. He is a man of little substance who gave a performance of no substance. When it comes to offering other directions for Queensland, he is a lightweight. Did he suggest better legislation than the Government has offered? No! Did he suggest better directions? No! He offered no positive action. He is a heavyweight in mudslinging. That is about as good as he is.

No wonder people do not listen to the details. No wonder they turn off when they hear politicians slinging mud. When all that people hear are 30-second grabs on radio or maybe a minute on the television news, it is no wonder that they cannot understand the complexity of the issue, particularly if

they are misled by the showmanship, the mudslinging, of a former Premier rather than being offered suggestions from both sides of the House as to how to deal with the matters at hand.

However, even much worse than that is the Opposition's avoidance of this serious business. During the dinner break, I asked myself why the Opposition is avoiding this legislation. Instead of standing with us, instead of passing this legislation through the House in five minutes by a unanimous vote and proudly redressing the situation, why is the Opposition avoiding it? I put it to honourable members opposite that some members of the public may dare to ask the same questions and reach conclusions similar to the ones that I have, and that is that the members opposite do not want to, because they do not really want the control. They do not really want to abide by the standards that Premier Beattie is setting not only for this side of the House but also for that side of the House.

This legislation confirms the standards that we have already in terms of probity checks and the licensing process for Internet interactive gaming. There is no diminution of the probity. This legislation ensures that, in the first instance, the Labor identities complete all documentation, as they have committed to do verbally, to sever their connections with Gocorp. It ensures that those Labor identities will make no profit. It ensures that Gocorp also attends to the full and complete documentation. It ensures that if there is a breach within 30 days—if any of the parties have not completed the paperwork—then the money, in default, will come back through the Government of Queensland to Queenslanders. There is no stronger action that this Government can take to say that how those people behaved was not acceptable.

Further, the legislation makes it clear not only in relation to this particular licence for Gocorp but also for all interactive gaming licence holders that disqualified persons will include all members of Parliament in the State of Queensland, their families and their staff. Disqualified persons will also include all local government councillors and their families. Is that not a matter that the Opposition should be proudly supporting? Again, I suggest that the question should be asked: why are they not supporting this? Why can they not agree that they, too, should be bound by the same standards?

Of course, the pity in the Opposition's refusal to accept that this is quality legislation that they should support is that we are using time to debate what is really a sideline matter. The important matter to Queenslanders is gambling. There is a recognition that gambling has grown exponentially and in some ways not for the betterment of the lives of many Queenslanders. Instead of concentrating on the very difficult issue of how we are going to manage Internet gambling, we are fiddling around the fringes. As a member of the Treasurer's gaming review committee, I have been confronted by the importance of this issue of interactive gaming, by how it is already out of control in other countries around the world and by how the legislation that was introduced to this Parliament by the now Opposition and supported by the Labor Party is indeed leading, quality legislation—the very legislation that guided our Treasurer in his actions in relation to this matter.

The Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act 1998, has set a standard that is regarded highly around Australia. The Australian Capital Territory and Victoria have passed very similar interactive legislation, based upon the Queensland model. South Africa and certain Canadian provinces have recognised and acknowledged the approach adopted by Queensland's regulatory framework. Indeed, the recent Productivity Commission report effectively endorsed the Queensland approach to Internet gaming. Therefore, as a proud Parliament, we should be looking to stay ahead of the action. The threat that all kinds of companies are seeking to make a profit that may yet put at risk the wellbeing of Queenslanders is a matter that we do not have answers for and it is a matter that this House should be addressing.

It is important that we pass the Bill that is before the House tonight and that will implement the high standards set by our Premier for all members of this House. It is also important that we wait for the investigations to be completed to discover whether, as I am sure will be the case, our Treasurer has acted in no way improperly but is indeed an honourable member of this House and a fine Treasurer. Maybe then we can get back to the main game. The main game is mediating and managing gambling in Queensland—gambling that is supposed to be for enjoyment and recreation, but which we now admit has got out of control in some areas. The main game is getting ahead of the likely impacts of Internet gaming and being in a position, therefore, to reassure Queenslanders that we are finding the ways to minimise the costs and maximise the benefits for them.