



Speech by

JEFF KNUTH

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Hansard 1 December 1999

ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—IND) (10.21 p.m.): I rise to speak on the motion moved by the member for Warwick. My colleagues have already mentioned the number of reports and inquiries into truth in political advertising and the resulting lack of action. Years and years later there is still no action. The latest report by the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee is just another one to add to the list. The main crux of this report is that legislation should be introduced to include how-to-vote cards in truth in advertising provisions and to provide for appeals to the Court of Disputed Returns.

Appealing to the Court of Disputed Returns was not an issue that we thought was urgently needed to give the public some faith in the electoral process, although it is probably a good idea. One Nation's Bill strengthens the truth in political advertising provisions. It places tighter restrictions upon advertising material. It addresses how-to-vote cards and will ensure that the author of the election matter must be named. It makes many further recommendations, such as ensuring that the author of the election matter is named. It goes further to recommend that, if the author of the election matter is from a political party, that party must also be named on all election material. It increases the penalties for failure to comply. It allows the lodgment of how-to-vote cards with the commission as a precautionary and voluntary fall-back should a challenge take place. It goes further than any other current provisions or recommendations by ensuring that executive officers of political parties must ensure that the party complies with truth in advertising provisions.

Had the Mansfield case, which followed the last election, been conducted under this Bill, not only would the member for Mansfield probably not be sitting in the Chamber today; he would also have been fined, as would Mike Kaiser or anyone else who had contributed to the development of or the directive to use false how-to-vote cards. Good legislation is demanded by the public. It is sad that we have to write it into law that politicians must not lie. The Country Party of Queensland is for the people. The people want to be told the truth. This Bill, if passed, will ensure that it is a lot harder for polities to tell lies during election campaigns. If they do, it provides the means to punish them and their party for their dishonest actions.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I think the member for Townsville would have to admit that most of north Queensland was relatively free of the problems that the south-east corner faced.

Mr Pitt interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I will not forget the member for Mulgrave. His by-election was relatively free of corruption and dirty politics. It was a fair election. However, we saw in respect of Heather Hill in Ipswich one of the filthiest campaigns ever witnessed in this State. I am not of her political party, but I feel that what that woman endured in that campaign should never happen in this State again.

Another issue where this Bill falls short is that of Independents being backed by political parties. Candidates are being put forward under the guise of Independents, because the parties know that they will lure a certain amount of the sympathy vote towards the Independent cause. Legislation should be brought in, and even this Bill amended, to make sure that Independents are true Independents and are not backed by or affiliated with political parties.

Mr Feldman: Stooges.

Mr KNUTH: They are stooges.

This is a deception of the public. The public is being lied to. People putting themselves forward as Independents should be true Independents. They should not be affiliated with political parties, should not have any financial backing from any political parties and should not have belonged to a political party for at least three years. I know this will happen at the next election. We will see false Independents put up everywhere. I will do my best to expose false Independents. However, I appreciate true Independents who come to this House as Independents and with their electorates—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I am not an Independent.

Mr Reynolds: You were a month ago.

Mr KNUTH: I am a member of the Country Party.

Mr Reynolds: But you were an Independent a month ago.

Mr KNUTH: I do not sit here as an Independent. That suggestion should stop right now.

Mr Reeves: You are a party of one.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am trying to listen to the member for Burdekin.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The member for Gregory raised a lot of good points about electoral boundaries. What he said was quite true.

A Government member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: The honourable member should not worry about the gerrymander. Labor won with 37% of the vote. If there is no gerrymander in this State, I do not know where one is.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Crows Nest and the member for Mansfield will cease their conversations. They should take their conversations outside so I can hear the member for Burdekin.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Electoral Commission decided to base electoral divisions on a voting pattern of 25,000 people. As the member for Gregory has illustrated, that is extremely unfair. The member for Fitzroy is not in the Chamber. However, he would know what I am speaking about. Sorry, the honourable member for Fitzroy is in the Chamber. A couple of months ago, you told me that you have 40 schools in your electorate.

Mr Pearce: Yes.

Mr KNUTH: I have roughly 40 schools in my electorate, too.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! It would help if the member for Burdekin spoke through the Chair. In that way the crossfire will dampen down.

Mr KNUTH: Sorry, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Some of my colleagues in the Townsville City area and other areas of the State have electorates of only four square kilometres in area and they may contain only five or six schools. Towns are scattered throughout my electorate of Burdekin, and it contains roughly 45 schools. Each of those schools needs representation. They would like me to visit and talk to them, raise flags and so on. It is a big job running around the electorate. I admit that I do not have the largest electorate. I think it is roughly the 10th or the 11th largest. However, representing it all takes up a lot of time. Members in rural or regional electorates have to do a lot of extra work and meet increasing demands. Electorates should not be based purely on population but on their diversity and size.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr KNUTH: As I said to the member, the gerrymander is already here. Any political party that can get in on 37% of the vote has to have a gerrymander.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mickel): Order! The member for Crows Nest! I am trying to listen to the member for Burdekin.

Mr KNUTH: If I recall, was it not the Labor Party that introduced the gerrymander in the first place? Then it soured, of course, and now somehow it has a gerrymander again.

I agree totally with the member for Gregory. Charters Towers is my neighbouring electorate and I feel sorry for the large distances that the member for Charters Towers has to cover. As my family are mainly cattle graziers in that electorate, I can understand the diversity and the problems that the member for Charters Towers has to face in travelling across that electorate. I think that the Electoral Commission may have to reconsider the decision on electoral boundaries because it is totally unfair that many rural members have to endure these large, massive—

Mr Reeves: So you are saying: change one vote, one value?

Mr KNUTH: I have no problem with the voting system at all.

An honourable member: North Queensland is going to secede.

Mr KNUTH: It is the dream of many north Queenslanders that north Queensland does secede. That is only a hope and a dream at the moment. The issue is very strong. The member for Townsville at least will agree with me on that issue.

Mr Reeves: Premier for Queensland, Jeff Knuth!

Mr KNUTH: That is flattering.

I think the Bill holds much merit and it is a step in the right direction. I believe that the people in this State deserve honesty in politics. I have been here for 18 months; I am only a newcomer, but I have learnt a lot in that time. Unfortunately, there are a lot of lies being told.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member's language is unparliamentary. I ask him to withdraw that word.

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw that. There are a lot of untruths and there is a lot of dirty politics going on at election time. I think that, as a Parliament, we have to bring back some honesty and integrity to the political system. People are disillusioned with party politics. Unless we make those changes—

Mr Reeves: Especially the new Country Party.

Mr KNUTH: The Country Party is honest. The Country Party has never—

Mrs Lavarch: So you won't do what One Nation did and hand out fake Green cards, "Think about the environment"?

Mr KNUTH: I have no idea about that. I have never seen that. I have no recollection of that. If they did do that, that is wrong.

Mrs Lavarch interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kurwongbah!

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: The Country Party is going quite well actually.

Mr Reeves: Have you ever had arguments with yourself?

Mr KNUTH: A few.

As I was saying before I was interrupted by the members opposite—I know that they have not got too much integrity, but it is time to bring some back to the House.

Mr REEVES: I rise to a point of order. I find those words offensive and untrue, and I ask for them to be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member has asked for a withdrawal.

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw challenging the member's integrity.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member will continue with his speech and he should try to address it to the Bill.

Mr KNUTH: I think the Bill is a step in the right direction. I really think that this Chamber—the members opposite and the members of the Government—should support this Bill because what have they got to lose? It will bring honesty back into the political system and into the voting system.
