



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 27 October 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Republic

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.34 a.m.), by leave: On 6 November Australians will vote in what is colloquially now called the republic referendum. I do not wish to use this House as a forum in which to debate this issue, although everyone knows that I have strong views on it. I had hoped that this issue would be above politics, just as the referendum that established the Commonwealth of Australia was. However, I wish to bring to the attention of the House a matter of grave concern.

Last Friday I wrote to the Australian Electoral Commissioner, Mr Bill Gray, detailing what I believe is a serious misrepresentation of my views on the republic contained in its information brochure sent to every Australian household. In common with many members in this House, I am 100% behind the "Yes" case. This brochure is a serious misrepresentation of my views. Electors may be falsely led to assume from page 13 of the AEC pamphlet that I support the "No" case, and that is not the case. I will be voting "Yes" on 6 November and I am offended that the AEC has allowed my name to be used in a way that seriously misrepresents my views.

I am a proud republican. The quotation on page 13 is accurate, but it does not reflect my views accurately and it does not reflect my views about November's referendum. I have been on the public record for many months now as a vigorous supporter of the "Yes" case. The fact that I argued at the Constitutional Convention for a different model for the selection of a republican head of state is not relevant to the current debate, which is about a different question altogether. Although I was participating in that debate, it is appropriate that, once the debate has concluded—which it did after the convention finished—and a majority position is reached amongst republicans, people accept the outcome of that convention, which I did.

The fact that I have long argued for constitutional change and acknowledged at the Constitutional Convention that it may be an incremental process is pertinent, but that is not stated by the AEC or the "No" case supporters. The truth about my views, which is not included in the AEC's official pamphlet, is that voting "Yes" on 6 November is the only way that Australians can build a republic for at least a generation. At no stage was I asked for permission to use my name to push the "No" case. The AEC did not even have the courtesy to tell me that my name was being used in this way. If it had been asked, I could have at least corrected the "No" case statement that I was Premier at the time I made my contribution at the Constitutional Convention.

Mr McGrady: A good contribution.

Mr BEATTIE: Indeed, it was.

It is a serious misrepresentation to say that I had made that contribution as Premier, although the then Premier was so hopeless that one could have been forgiven for thinking that I was Premier at the time. It is simply not true and cannot be allowed to stand as part of the AEC's official record. Therefore, I ask the AEC to correct this situation through prominent notices in the major newspapers in each State. Yesterday Mr Gray wrote back to me—at least I received it yesterday—saying that the AEC does not intend to take any action. That response is simply arrogance of the highest order. It is little wonder that Australians are losing faith in what were once well respected institutions. I would have expected a more responsible response from the commission.

In spite of this arrogance, I will push on with the "Yes" case. Today I will be campaigning with the Honourable Leader of the Federal Opposition, Kim Beazley, and other prominent members of the House of Representatives in favour of the "Yes" case. Tomorrow I will join the Leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party, Dr David Watson, in signing the Republican Founders Book—a clear demonstration that there is bipartisan support for the republic. On this occasion, I wish to pay tribute to the courage demonstrated by the Leader of the Liberal Party on this issue. It is not often that he and I share similar views. However, it is good to see that a man occasionally will stand up on principle. I hope this is the beginning of many occasions when the Leader of the Liberal Party will share my views.
