



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 17 August 1999

INTERACTIVE GAMBLING (PLAYER PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (11.32 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Amendment Bill. I have a few points that I would like to raise. It is not my job to pass judgment on the member for Ipswich. That job belongs to the CJC, the Auditor-General, and, ultimately, the people of Ipswich. They are the people who will decide whether his actions were right or wrong.

However, I will pass comment on the concept that the use of knowledge of Acts and so forth gained as a member of Parliament is abhorrent to most people. Woodridge is an area that is badly affected by unemployment. I believe that the people of Woodridge would not take too kindly to members of Parliament making this sort of money out of deals of this type. I am not passing judgment on whether or not the dealings were legal. The problem lies with a person making millions and millions of dollars from what I would call insider trading. I do not think it is appropriate. I do not believe that the people of Woodridge would believe it is appropriate. I believe that the general public and the people of Tablelands would also believe that it is not appropriate.

I am not saying that members of Parliament should not have interests in business. I believe the people of Queensland would like to know that good businessmen were running the State. I believe they would be happy to know that the Treasurer was a businessman who had knowledge of business dealings. On the other hand, I do not believe that a flagrant disregard of a position of trust is looked on kindly by the people of Queensland. As I said, ultimately the people of Ipswich and the people of Woodridge will be the judges of whether this affair is going to go any further than it is tonight. Obviously it is not going to go much further tonight.

This brings me to my second point. We have a Government in Queensland which is very strong on saying that it is an open, honest and accountable Government. I saw evidence of that in Atherton. The Cabinet came to Atherton and appeared in public. Many people came to me after the Atherton Community Cabinet meeting and told me that they were quite amazed, to say the least, and were quite happy with the outcomes of the meeting.

My problem is that an open, honest and accountable Government would go out of its way to provide all the necessary information to ensure that legislation does not become clouded for members of this Chamber. I am not an avid reader of the Courier-Mail. I call the Courier-Mail the Red Banner and I personally do not have it delivered to my office. People drop in newspaper clippings to me now and again.

All I have heard so far is rumour and innuendo. I have seen clippings from newspapers. At no time did anyone from the ALP or the Government call me and say, "Shaun, there is a briefing on. Would you like to attend?" No-one sent me even so much as a note. I do not believe it is my job to come chasing the Government and asking, "Hey, what is the story? What is the deal here? Is this all true? Is it rubbish? Is it lies?" I think an honest, open and accountable Government should find the Independent member of Parliament and say, "Look, there is a briefing available when you come down to Parliament, if you would like to sit in on it."

I know that quite often Cabinet Ministers do that. I often receive letters from Ministers saying that there is a briefing on legislation which is coming before the Parliament. However, in this case no-one from the Government, the Labor Party, or any of the people involved sought me out. I state

publicly that it is my belief that in an honest, open and accountable Government it is not my job to go hounding the Government for information.

I am a very busy person. I am one person and I have one electorate officer. I have a large electorate to look after. I believe that an honest, open and accountable Government would have made every possible effort to clear its name with a member of Parliament who has to vote on the issue.

That brings me to this Bill. The only information I have is the information we received this afternoon. I am expected to vote on the appropriateness of this Bill proceeding through the Parliament. The same thing applied to the Industrial Relations Bill which was rammed through this House. I imagine that the Government holds me in incredible esteem and believes that I have incredible reading abilities and incredible powers of understanding on these subjects, but the fact is that I cannot sit down, read through this Bill and judge the appropriateness of it. I do not have the benefit of Crown Law advice. I do not have the benefit of advisers or researchers. As a result, I have to sit here in blind ignorance and say that I will not vote for something which will have unknown ramifications. These matters are entrenched in law and we do not know what will happen in the next couple of months. There is no way that a member of Parliament could vote for such legislation in the absence of a briefing or any approach from the Government. I have not even been approached and told, "Shaun, the allegations are not true."

I want to refer to the similarity between this situation and the ongoing references to the Mundingburra affair. At no time did the Queensland Police Union, or anyone in that union, stand to benefit to the order of millions of dollars in profits. This might be flying in the face of political correctness and the chest thumping that goes on in this place, but to me the heart of the Mundingburra affair was an attempt to get greater police numbers on the streets in an effort to clean up criminal activity. It was an effort to get the Queensland Police Service back on track. This occurred at a time when morale was low, when the numbers of police on the streets were incredibly low and when police powers to deal with offenders were incredibly low. What we are dealing with are two completely—

Mr Feldman: The trailer only said "Vote for more police".

Mr NELSON: Yes, the trailer only said "Vote for more police". I would vote for more police. I daresay most members in this House would also do that.

The simple fact is that the differences between the two situations are phenomenal. On the one hand, we had the Police Union doing what it is there to do—looking after its members and, in doing that, protecting the people of Queensland—and on the other hand we have a couple of individuals who stood to profit personally, and in some cases to the extent of millions and millions of dollars. I do not see the similarity.

We hear many reasons as to why politicians are held in low regard. I believe that one of the main reasons why politicians are held in low regard is what I call tit-for-tat politics—"That is what they did when they were in Government", or "That is what they did, and this is how they reacted." When I used to go to my mum and say, "But my little brother punched my other little brother in the head", that was not an excuse; I still got a flogging. The simple fact remains that there is no reason at all for the Government to say, "Look at what happened during the Mundingburra affair. Look at what the previous Attorney-General did. Look at what this person did." That is making excuses. That is not being an honest, open and accountable Government. That is pointing the finger and saying, "If it was good for you, then we are going to do the same thing."

I dare say that the people who voted for Labor at the last election did not intend Labor to shadow everything that its avowed enemies did, or were supposed to have done, when they were in Government. I dare say that when the people voted for Labor, they voted for today's Labor to come into this place and be completely different from the previous Government, and to be an open, honest and accountable Government.

I applaud the decision made by the member for Ipswich to stand aside. However, I must take this opportunity to question the point of standing aside when the member still receives his ministerial benefits and he still receives his pay. To me, that is not standing aside. Recently, I was removed from Parliament. What was my punishment? My pay was not docked. I did not receive anything but a flight home to go on with my electoral duties. The simple fact remains that I know exactly what the people back home on the streets of Mareeba, Atherton and Malanda and the other towns of my electorate are going to say when they hear that the Treasurer has stood aside but that he is still getting his full remuneration. They are going to say, "What? I thought when a member stood aside he actually got punished." Apart from a little bit of embarrassment and some political name calling, I do not see the punishment in the Treasurer standing aside. I do not see how that constitutes the member being stood aside from his ministerial position. Maybe I am just ignorant of the whole process.

Mr Bredhauer interjected.

Mr NELSON: I honestly believe that if the Treasurer stood aside and was going to move to the backbench, he should have moved to the backbench on a backbencher's salary and waited until his name was cleared by the CJC and the Auditor-General and then, if that happened, move back to the

front bench. I do not think that I would have a problem with that and I certainly know that the people in my electorate would not have a problem with that, especially if the member was cleared.

Recently, when I was removed from Parliament people asked me if my pay was docked. I said, "No, it was not." They then asked, "What is the punishment?" I said, "I do not know—probably my flight home."

Ms Bligh: Deprived of the pleasure of our company.

Mr NELSON: Exactly. The point I make is that what we are dealing with, and what gets lost in all of these issues, is public perception. Most people, especially in north Queensland, have very little knowledge indeed of what goes on in this place—the political manoeuvring, the posturing and the stances. They do not get into that sort of thing; they are not interested in reality. They are interested in knowing that their members of Parliament will come to this place, represent them on issues that are put forward, and at all times deal with them fairly. The people might not always get what they want. They might not get the outcomes that they are looking for, but they fully expect an open, honest and accountable Government, particularly when a Government professes to be open, honest and accountable and goes out of its way to do things like hold Community Cabinet meetings.

I think that this issue is certainly one that, had it been handled completely differently, may have had a chance of gaining not only my support but also the support of other members of this side. Rushing this legislation through the House the way in which we are tonight is sending a clear message that the Government is not trying to solve a problem; it is just what I would call a typical knee-jerk reaction and trying to stamp something down to make the Government look big. Quite often in interrogation circles it is said that the person who has the most to hide screams the loudest and shouts blue murder at the top of their lungs. You can always smell out a rat by the way they scream that they are not a rat. When the Government jumps up and rams retrospective legislation through the Parliament in one single night and carries on like blue murder instead of, as the member for Gladstone and other members have said, laying the legislation on the table and letting members look at it and have a think about it, letting members such as me, with my limited resources, go through the Bill to see whether or not I can support it, the people in my electorate are going to ask, "How can we trust these people when they will not even allow that sort of accountability, especially on an important issue?" This issue has received wide coverage in the media. The people know about it. However, they are getting only small pieces of information about this legislation. Tomorrow in the news they are going to get a small cut of information about this issue being rammed through Parliament. In the area where I come from, that does not do the Government's cause any good at all.

Given more time, given the ability to review the issue, and maybe even given a briefing from the Government—a few facts and figures from them—I could have supported this legislation. However, in its current form, in the current shadow that it is positioned and the current lack of flow of information from the Government—for whatever reason—I will not support this Bill in its current form. I strongly urge all Government members to think again before they try this sort of action, because all it does is reflect very badly on them in the communities that were just beginning to trust them.
