



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 15 March 2000

GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY CONTROL BILL

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (8.31 p.m.): I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

Recent events have highlighted the Beattie Government's total impropriety and hypocrisy on the multimillion-dollar business of public sector advertising. Earlier this month, the Australian Broadcasting Authority ruled that Government advertising of Labor's controversial industrial relations laws were undeniably political. In other words, the Government was caught out spending public money on political propaganda. It knew the rules and it broke the rules.

The Auditor-General is also investigating the expenditure of public money on political advertising commissioned by WorkCover last year. The ABA's guidelines on political advertising were introduced in 1998, well before the Government's commercials were put to air. This was a clear-cut case of breaching clear-cut rules, and the remedy was equally clear cut.

Under the Premier's own prescription, the advertising bill should have been paid by the ALP. The Government had a clear obligation to seek reimbursement from Labor Party headquarters. It has not done so, and it refuses to do so. This is the clearest evidence yet that the Premier's so-called code of conduct on Government advertising is not worth the paper it is written on.

If his shonky code was worth a cracker, Queensland taxpayers would not be paying for political propaganda. That was the acid test, and the Premier failed. There is nothing in this shabby excuse for a code of conduct—nothing—to stop the Premier spending millions of dollars on Government advertising right up to election day.

The guidelines consist of 12 lines. The exceptions, excuses and escape clauses take up 15 lines. A fleet of trucks could be driven through this code. There is more hole than substance. This is a Clayton's code—the code we have to have when we do not want a code. It is totally useless.

The Premier will not even comply with existing provisions administered by the ABA, so why would he worry about his own shonky code? This is just political camouflage—and how things change. Less than two years ago, the member for Brisbane Central was promising to slash Government advertising by \$12m a year, or \$48m over four years. We now know that Government advertising blew out to an all-time record last year—more than \$77m. It has gone from \$60m-odd to \$77m in the blink of an eye. It now plans to splurge more than \$300m over the next four years.

This is the same Government squeezing essential services such as health, education and the police while the Premier feeds his ego at Queensland's expense. What hypocrisy! What a disgrace! This is a Government sacking surgeons in our hospitals because there are not enough health dollars, ripping teachers out of schools because they are one or two students short of a quota and banning police from making arrests which might put them into overtime.

The people of Queensland are sick and tired of the Premier and his mates spending up big on shameless self-promotion and political propaganda. In conclusion, I simply quote the second-reading speech of the member for Brisbane Central when he tabled identical provisions in 1998. This is what he said about the Bill—

"It creates an all-party parliamentary committee to scrutinise Government publicity which has the capacity to influence public support for a political party or its candidates or for a member of the Legislative Assembly, and it provides guidelines for the sort of publicity which is considered proper. It will ensure that, as far as possible, public money is not spent on Government publicity for a partisan political purpose. It will scrutinise and formulate guidelines for Government publicity that appears to the committee to have the capacity of being used for partisan political purposes. The committee's area of responsibility includes monitoring and reviewing spending by public authorities on Government publicity. We can, and will, make a difference on behalf of the people of Queensland."

I commend this Bill to the House.
