



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 22 August 2000

ELECTORAL FRAUD

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (5.47 p.m.): As a member of the all-party Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, I am indeed pleased to support the motion and pleased, too, that we on all sides of the House are supporting this motion. In that regard, I commend the member for Nicklin for his initiative.

As other members have mentioned already, we are speaking in this debate about the very core of our democracy. We have, compared with other countries, a very fine system—a system of much greater integrity than has existed in many other countries. Personally, I am a strong supporter of compulsory voting. I know that many people in our electorates are disenchanted with politicians and politics in general and sometimes doubt the wisdom of Government decisions. Nonetheless, people having a say and casting their vote is really an essential part of Australia's freedom. However, for those of us who are charged with the responsibility of overseeing the administration of our democracy via voting rights and voting procedures, a balance needs to be struck between maintaining proper standards that ensure integrity and the enfranchisement of, as far as possible, all of those people in our community who are 18 and over.

This year, an important review that has been conducted by the committee—and all members of the committee agreed with the report's recommendations—was into the Federal Government's proposed new rules for electoral enrolment. Originally, those rules were as tight as the rules that applied for people getting a passport. Therefore, the rules required that those people who are placed on the electoral roll obtain identification and checks and proof from people who had special qualifications, such as in law or in the ministry. They were excessive checks that, in the end, would have disfranchised so many adult Australians. It was the strong view of the committee that, in seeking that balance between ensuring integrity and enfranchisement, we are better to err on the side of enfranchisement by making it easier to be enrolled rather than not to be enrolled.

In the process the committee also reviewed the Federal Government's findings in regard to the level of electoral fraud around Australia. The conclusions of the substantive reports on this issue were that it is so small as to be negligible. However, there is no guarantee that there is not a number of votes from time to time in one or another electorate in a State, Federal or local election that have been filed in error or even deliberately—corruptly. But the evidence of this is so insubstantial or so rare that it is not a matter of great consideration for those of us charged with the responsibilities such as we have in this House.

For example, far more important is the problem of enrolling those between the ages of 18 and 23. The low rate of enrolment of young people in this age group is of much greater concern and contributes much more, it is estimated, to possible changes in the way votes determine members of Parliament and the carriage of Government. Therefore, it is more deserving of the attention of honourable members than is attempting to find yet more rules and ways to stop those who are hell-bent on corrupt practice. It is so in this regard and in other areas of life that, no matter how closely we might attempt to put in regulations, those who are hell-bent on corrupt practices will find a way. As a committee, we saw this to be the case when we examined the issue of second preferences votes. When we looked closely at this matter and we began to consider putting in regulations about the sizes and authorisations of various materials, we found out how hard it was to close all loopholes.

One of the other wonderful things that I have discovered and which I did not know as an ordinary Queenslander prior to becoming a member of LCARC is how fine in integrity, skill, expertise and impartial advice to all honourable members is the Electoral Commission. I take this opportunity to send my best regards.

Nonetheless, we should be mindful, as the member for Nicklin has reminded us, that there may always be ways in which we can do the job even better than we are doing it now. For that reason, I am very happy to support his motion and we will continue, therefore, to seek an even better system than we already have.
