



Speech by

GARY FENLON

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard 22 August 2000

ELECTORAL FRAUD

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (5.33 p.m.): It is a pleasure to second the motion moved today by the member for Nicklin. I do so because I see this as a very positive gesture in advancing the ongoing efforts of various authorities, and the past efforts of LCARC, to ensure that our electoral system in general, and our electoral roll in particular, has the level of integrity expected by Queenslanders.

I second this motion with some trepidation, as I am also aware of the workload that the committee secretariat has experienced and presently has before it, as can be seen from the committee's annual report and the fact that the committee is currently completing its report in response to a substantial reference from the Parliament regarding the FOI Act. I welcome this request and I will be recommending to the committee that it undertakes an inquiry into the subject matter raised in the motion as it provides an opportunity to draw together information regarding the various positive initiatives already in various stages of initiation, to report on the status of these initiatives and how they might be expeditiously advanced and to canvass other legislative and/or administrative initiatives that may provide greater protection against attempts at electoral fraud that may not already be considered or initiated.

I welcome the statements made by the member for Nicklin in relation to what he envisages as the parameters of such an inquiry as set by jurisdiction and the practicality of returning any initiative via a report to this Parliament in adequate time to allow investigation of any legislation and/or administration solutions prior to an election.

While I do not wish to pre-empt any of the committee's decisions regarding the initiation or parameters of any inquiry, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several issues that honourable members and the general public should take heed of in the pursuit of improvements in this sphere. First, we must recognise that we now have in Australia—and in Queensland in particular—one of the most highly regarded free and fair voting systems in the western world that is very efficiently and effectively conducted. This commendation must also be attributed to the well-respected staff of the QEC under the leadership of Mr Des O'Shea. Queensland's voting system is a system that runs so well, based upon trust in its many participants from the act of enrolment through to the act of voting during the course of an election.

For such an openly democratic system built upon pillars of public trust, history reveals very little evidence of electoral fraud that would affect the result of an election. Report No. 19 regarding the implication of the new Commonwealth enrolment requirements cited the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters on the 1996 Federal Election and found that—

"Electoral fraud can encompass multiple voting (in the names of existing electors, or in false names deliberately placed on the roll for that purpose), being enrolled for the wrong House of Representatives electorate, or being a foreign citizen or underage. Obviously some of these circumstances can also arise through misunderstanding on the part of electors, rather than deliberate attempts at fraud. The inquiry did not reveal improper enrolment or voting sufficient to affect any result at an election."

The subject of dual and multiple voting also arises, and in its submission dated 10 October 1999 to the JSCEM the commission also stated—

"There are comprehensive checks and balances in the Electoral Act, and in AEC administrative procedures, that ensure that instances of multiple voting are detectable. Individual cases of multiple voting are prosecuted after every Federal election, but there is no evidence that the result in any Federal election since the establishment of the AEC in 1984 has been compromised by widespread and organised fraudulent enrolment and voting, despite the claims to the contrary made by critics of the Federal electoral system."

I provide these quotations not as any suggestion of complacency regarding these matters, but to urge a sense of reality as a starting point for such an endeavour. Any prospect of moving toward greater regulation of these areas may come at a cost, as Professor Colin Hughes cautioned in relation to Commonwealth moves towards tightened enrolment procedures when he stated—

"It would have costs that would operate to the detriment of relatively disadvantaged elements of the community and that any decision to change major elements of the present system needs to weigh those costs very carefully."

There are, however, very positive directions that I will recommend to the committee as important positive starting points to such an inquiry. These include the development of continuous roll updating procedures, the move towards an address-based roll management system and revisitation of the issue of abandoning the joint roll arrangements with the Commonwealth and any advantages that Queensland might obtain from pursuing that course.

I have great confidence in the capacity of the hard-working members of LCARC to approach this subject with the vigour and bipartisanship that they have already displayed throughout this term and I have great confidence in the capacity of the public to generate sound and constructive ideas. The LCARC performs a very important function in being entrusted with its role of forging such a bipartisan approach to electoral reform in Queensland as originally envisaged in the Fitzgerald report and its antecedents in the form of EARC and PEARC. I therefore call upon all honourable members to continue to support such bipartisanship in the pursuit of this very important area of legal and administrative reform.

Time expired.
