



Speech by

**JOHN MICKEL**

**MEMBER FOR LOGAN**

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Hansard 29 February 2000

**LIBERAL PARTY SENATE CANDIDATE**

**Mr MICKEL** (Logan—ALP) (11.59 a.m.): The Liberal Party has requested two months—that is, until 16 May—to find a Senate candidate to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Warwick Parer. To the disappointment of this Parliament and I suspect to the majority of the Queensland parliamentary Liberal Party, the member for Clayfield has said publicly he will not fill this plum job. It is this spirit of self-sacrifice which has made the member for Clayfield the much loved and revered figure that he is in the modern Liberal Party.

**A Government member:** And so popular!

**Mr MICKEL:** Yes, and so popular. However, I want to assure honourable members that he will have another opportunity soon when the next vacancy occurs with the resignation of Senator Herron. Now that the Liberal Party has months to trawl through its dispirited ranks to find a replacement, one would think that it would go about this with fair and proper preselection processes. Indeed, one assumes that that is the reason the Liberal Party State President gave when he asked for the election of a new senator to be deferred until May, which is a gap of three months in replacement time. But the Weekend Australian blew the lid on the real reason for the delay. It said—

"The chances of Mr Brandis, already seen as a front runner to replace Mr Parer, have received a further boost with a new F.E.C. being formed in the Federal seat of Rankin with all its 10 delegates expected to back him in the contest."

The Federal seat of Rankin currently overlaps my State seat and the neighbouring seat of Woodridge held by my friend and colleague, Mr Kaiser. As anyone can attest, and the member for Woodridge knows only too well, the Liberal Party in Woodridge and Logan is not just an endangered species. In fact, it is extinct. During the recent Woodridge by-election, the Liberals had to cast around for weeks to find someone—in fact, plead with anyone—who would run and then their only role was to be dragged out before the unsuspecting TV crews and then disappear for the rest of the day. They had no on-the-ground support and no money.

The Liberal Party has had no organisation in Rankin. Some time ago, in desperation they amalgamated the few remaining people in the Rankin Federal division with the nearby Moreton Federal division. But what has happened in the past couple of days? Suddenly, like Lazarus, the Liberal Party in Rankin has risen from the dead and produced a whole new Federal electorate council. Why? Is it because their vote in Woodridge did not get to double figures? Is it because they achieved the lowest vote since the party was formed 50 years ago? No! It is because, within its own council, Rankin will have 10 delegates who can vote in the Liberal Party Senate preselection contest. That is the only reason the Liberals needed more time for the choosing of the candidate. It has nothing to do with the search for a quality candidate. It is all about branch stacking.

Members will recall that I told this House last year that, along with the artificial bloating of the branch membership in the Federal seat of Ryan, the seat of Moreton was undergoing major change with the sudden influx of Taiwanese branch members. Under the crank rules of the Liberal Party, members not only do not have to reside in the electorate in which they vote but do not even have to reside in Australia. As an added bonus, they do not even have to be an Australian citizen. Overseas visitors to Queensland can drop in and visit their relatives, enjoy a bus trip to Logan and Woodridge and vote for the delegates to choose the Queensland Liberal Party Senate candidate. What a tourist package deal! The only way the Liberal Party Federal division has been resurrected so quickly is the

moving of 100 members of a Taiwanese branch from the Federal seat of Moreton and re-registering them within the Federal seat of Rankin. So a party which needs months to find a candidate only took days to sort a preselection. This breathtakingly cynical exercise is being rushed through in record time to boost the chances of Mr George Brandis.

Members might recall that last year Mr Brandis was put in charge of a committee to review the party's constitution. In other words, they put in charge of the review someone who has a vested interest in never bringing down a report. It is like putting Christopher Skase in charge of a review of Spanish extradition laws. No wonder the Liberal Party in Queensland has not moved more quickly to clean up what are the most crooked and shabby preselection rules in Australia. A solution to the problem is not in the best interests of the unrepresentative few who control the Liberal Party. At the same time, the Liberal Party is treating ethnic groups with contempt. The mass recruitment of ethnic groups into the Liberal Party has everything to do with factional power games inside the Liberal Party. It is not a genuine desire for active participation by them.

Ethnic groups are being moved around like pawns on a chess board by the Liberal Party rather than being sought out for any positive contribution they can make. I am sure that these decent and hardworking people are unaware that they are being manipulated like this. I urge them to resign in protest at their shabby treatment and stick with people with a proven track record of looking after them and their interests—people such as the member for Sunnybank, the Honourable the Minister for Emergency Services, and his colleague the councillor for Acacia Ridge, Kevin Bianchi, both of whom have had their best interests at heart for some time.

The Liberal Party stabbed ethnic groups in the back with the preference deal with One Nation at the last election. In the Bundamba by-election, I am told by reliable sources that the party President, Con Galtos, held secret preference discussions with Heather Hill before he was flushed out by the Labor Party State Secretary and now member for Woodridge. As a result of that flushing out exercise, Con Galtos backed away from it. In other words, they would have ratted on ethnic groups again given half a chance. The Liberal Party State President, Con Galtos, and the member for Clayfield, Santo Santoro, are serial branch stackers. They have form as long as my arm and they show no signs of remorse or rehabilitation.

It amazes me that the Prime Minister has not intervened to save the Liberal Party from the embarrassment of having to wait three months to fill a Senate vacancy whilst it is convulsed with ethnic branch stacking. The fact of the matter is that John Howard does not have the support of the Queensland branch, so he has nothing to lose by moving on them, anyway. The only forays into Queensland by the Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, are for fundraisers for the member for Clayfield. I am told that the member for Clayfield then uses the money to buy votes in ethnic branch stacking exercises to undermine John Howard's supporters.

**Mr McGrady:** Will he be paying GST on that?

**Mr MICKEL:** He will be paying GST on it. The pleasant thing about it is that, as a result of the GST which the member for Clayfield just so stoically defended, he will have fewer branch members to stack because it is going to cost a lot more. The fact of the matter is that it is time the Prime Minister intervened and imposed some decency on this wayward Queensland branch of the Liberal Party. Queensland should not be denied a senator because the Liberals are still stacking branches. We need someone who can go to Canberra and stand up for Queensland so we can get a fair share of funds for the RFA.

Above all, we need someone who will make the Federal Government see the error of its ways with the GST, because it is quite plain from the speech made this morning by the member for Clayfield that he does not understand the policy of the GST. In fact, it is his secret plan to become leader. He will stand by the GST until every other Liberal but him is wiped out. By that process of elimination, he will become the leader of the Liberal Party in this place. I assure members of the Liberal Party holding marginal seats that he will fight for the GST till the last drop of blood in marginal seats. He will stand there and fight toe to toe until they all disappear under that wave of public indignation at the GST. We need a senator who will go to Canberra and fight the Federal Government and fight the GST. The elderly and the small businesspeople who believe in the Liberal Party and who have been the traditional backbone of the Liberal Party deserve much better than what is being offered at present.

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