



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Hansard 16 March 2000

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE
Report

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (10.16 a.m.): I second the motion moved by the honourable member for Greenslopes. The report of the Commonwealth's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters was not a unanimous report from that all-party committee. The majority report expressed an extreme view on possible fraudulent electoral enrolment that was not borne out by submissions and particularly not borne out by the submission and evidence of the Australian Electoral Commission. Of course, there are always opportunities to abuse elements of any electoral system, and obviously we all know about instances of electoral fraud as practised in Townsville in recent times.

The recommendation of the joint standing committee, even if carried to ultimate lengths, would not have prevented those fraudulent practices, which are still before the courts. It would seem that the joint standing committee has been overinfluenced by an overenthusiastic lobby group and conspiracy theorists. In recommending the extreme tightening up of enrolment procedures, which forms the basis of its majority report, the joint standing committee did not give sufficient weight to the detrimental effect this could have on persuading young first-time voters to join the electoral roll. The Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee, whose report into these matters we are speaking on today, has viewed this matter with extreme concern. We are of the view that the recommended procedures, if implemented, will place severe restrictions in the path of first-time voters. They will make enrolment extremely difficult for some first-time voters—so difficult that many could decide to opt out of the system and simply not enrol at all.

I am amazed at the lack of interest in the resulting legislation shown by Federal members and senators on both sides of politics, as the legislation dealing with electoral matters went through both Houses of Federal Parliament without a whisper. It would seem that most of our Federal colleagues on both sides of politics gave little thought to the serious implications of the joint standing committee's recommendations embodied in the legislation. However, all is not yet lost, as the legislation will not be proclaimed until the regulations go through, and those regulations are still being formulated. Thanks to the LCARC report, this has now become quite a hot topic and we can only hope that commonsense will prevail and the regulations will not be as stringent as first envisaged. There needs to be a relaxation of the identification requirement and broadening of the witnessing qualifications.

The Australian Electoral Commission and the Electoral Commissioner of Queensland are more interested in encouraging young people to enrol and are discussing a variety of means to this end. The reliability of the electoral roll is of far greater concern, and there needs to be a greater enhancement of continuous roll updating procedures which replace periodic reviews by house-to-house canvass and which will ensure better roll maintenance and greater accuracy of electoral rolls. LCARC has explored some of these options in section 7 of its report. Queensland has the option of reverting to its own electoral roll system, which was current prior to the Commonwealth taking over joint roll responsibilities after the Electoral Act 1992. This is the option of last resort and we can only hope the Commonwealth takes up a more balanced approach to the regulations than was shown by the joint standing committee report.