



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

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Hansard 17 May 2001

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (5.23 p.m.): I rise to speak to this Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In so doing, I remember very clearly the day this bill was tabled during the last term and the furore that surrounded its introduction. I had heard lots of rumours about what was contained in the bill at that time, but being a fair-minded person I believe very strongly that every member of this House has the right to introduce bills. Every one of us has the right to at least be heard.

Not knowing what was specifically in the bill, I voted with Labor so that the bill could be brought into the House for the first reading. I wanted to do that because I wanted to base my vote on an understanding of what was there, not on hearsay and supposition. Needless to say, the hearsay and supposition contained a lot of truth. At that time the conservative members of the House criticised me heavily for voting to allow this bill into the House, for allowing that first reading. I also have to state that never before had I actually witnessed a bill being opposed at the first reading stage. I believe every member of this House will recall that this bill was presented not long before the state election was expected to be called. I know the possibility was on everybody's lips and most candidates had already been preselected. At least in my electorate that was the case.

As I stated earlier, I faced quite a censuring from the conservatives in this House. I realise that this was because their candidate who stood against me was in fact a local government councillor and by all accounts was believed to be very much a certainty to win. My vote to allow the bill into the House was seen as a move by me to penalise my opposition. Many a verbal threat of, 'You're history, Dorothy,' and, 'You'll pay for this, Dorothy,' were directed at me in this chamber.

My reason for voting to allow the bill into the House, as I have stated before, was that I did not know exactly what it contained. Each of us must permit others to bring bills into the House if we wish to be allowed to do so. With a majority party government, whether that be a majority of one or 50, any private member's bill could be stopped at the very time of the first reading if the government of the day so chose. If it were ever allowed to happen, that would be a disastrous display of the misuse of power.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the bill did not get debated due to the calling of the election; all bills remaining on the *Notice Paper* at that time lapsed when the parliament was prorogued. After the great hullabaloo from the opposition at the first effort by the Beattie government to present the bill, I was more than surprised that the reintroduction of the bill did not raise an eyebrow, with not even one voice raised in outrage at the first reading this time around. I have to wonder if I missed something somewhere, or was it that the election was over and there was no mileage to be gained in the electorates?

Having remembered all that, I would now like to address the particular issue of the forcing of councillors to resign from council once they become candidates for state or Commonwealth parliament. I am assuming that the proposition is that a councillor is to resign at the time of the calling of the election, not necessarily at the time of preselection, as that time could be six months, 12 months or more prior to the election. I can imagine the concerns of this government that that candidate may use a council as his platform and in so doing be seen to be disadvantaging any other candidate standing for election. On the other hand, I can also see how a good councillor may be lost to a council and that council being put, perhaps unnecessarily, to the expense of a local government by-election if the councillor lost.

This is an issue I polled extensively in my electorate, across all eligible voting age groups and all cross-sections of the community. I cannot quote the exact figure, but somewhere in the vicinity of 7,000 questionnaires went out. Somewhere between 10 and 14 per cent were returned—I think it was about 11 and a half per cent. I felt it was a pretty good indication of what the community was feeling.

I also realise there is a lot of voter anger at people putting their hand up for election to council knowing full well, and having stated publicly in the media prior to the local government elections, that they were going to contest the next state or federal election, those elections being due six to 12 months down the track. The view of the electorate was that the individual did not care about costing ratepayers a by-election, did not care about representing them at council level if they could go further and viewed their election to council purely as a stepping stone to higher self-promotion.

Whether these thoughts were justified or fair, only the persons themselves know. My decision to vote to allow the bill into the House and the attacks by the National Party on me received a lot of media coverage in my electorate prior to the election. Because of that I feel the people of my electorate were well enough informed on this matter to make their own judgment and perhaps the outcome in the election to some extent reflected their view on this matter as well as many other issues.

I refer to the comment made by the member for Warrego about an editorial in the *South Burnett Times*. The editor at the time of that editorial had at one stage worked for the former National Party Primary Industries Minister, Mr Trevor Perrett. I am not saying that there was a bias there, but with an election very close and the editor's previous political affiliation, one can only be left to wonder—

**An honourable member:** Go on, say it.

**Mrs PRATT:** No, I am not going to criticise him. He has been good to me, but I cannot exclude the possibility that the man had coloured his thinking.

The seat of Barambah was a very safe National Party seat. At the last election there were three candidates, and I believe that the National Party candidate—a very good man—bore the brunt of the feeling at the time. His vote did not reflect his popularity at all. He came third in a three-horse race, beaten by an Independent and the Labor candidate in what was once a very safe National Party seat.

I do not agree entirely with the section of the bill that provides that a councillor must resign when he or she becomes a candidate for an election. As I said before, I believe that if that happened, a good councillor would be lost to a council. I believe that a council is an exceptional training ground for any member of parliament. In fact, I wish I had had that training myself; it would have helped me to understand legislation a lot quicker. I believe that, if a member of parliament had that council experience, he or she would be an effective member of parliament more quickly and, therefore, an absolute asset to his or her constituents.

As I said, I surveyed both my old electorate and my new electorate on this issue. I covered quite a large area. As I said also, I received responses to that survey from over 10 per cent of the people surveyed, with 76 per cent of that 10 per cent being in favour of councillors resigning when they become candidates and 24 per cent being against. There is no doubt in my mind that I must represent this majority view.

As I have told my electorate many times, I am an individual, I am an Independent. As an individual, I have one point of view and my electorate has another point of view. Therefore, I must represent the majority view of my electorate.

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