



Speech by

Mrs J. SHELDON

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard 5 December 2001

FOUR-YEAR PARLIAMENTARY TERMS

Mrs SHELDON (Caloundra—Lib) (6.11 p.m.): I second the motion. In doing so, I point out that what is on the line is the Premier's credibility. No doubt the Premier will move an amendment and, no doubt, the Premier, like Baldrick, has a cunning plan. It will be interesting to see how good the cunning plan really is. Also, we want a firm commitment from the Premier that he will support a fixed four-year term, not just a four-year term. There is a precedent for this, because Nick Greiner in New South Wales did this. Nick Greiner brought credibility and accountability to the whole process there, and there are definite benefits to a four-year term. Unlike the Beattie Labor government's imposition on local government for fixed four-year terms—no question of a referendum, no asking of the people—the Liberals believe the people should make that fundamental decision relating to the structure of their democracy and we therefore support a referendum on the issue, believing it is vital to good government.

We believe opposition parties should pursue progressive policy agendas and not obstructionist policy agendas, and that four-year terms would bring Queensland, which would be the last state not to have four-year terms, into line with other states. Fixed terms certainly provide certainty and fairness. People know where they are going. They are better for governments and oppositions. A government has time to put its policy agendas forward, to articulate them, to enact them without, if you like, the sword of Damocles hanging over its head in terms of an election. Similarly, oppositions can build, enunciate and attain credibility in the community for their policies over that time. So, there are great pluses. Further, it is very fair in that it takes away from a government the ability to call an election simply to exploit a political opportunity. Certainly, this happened at the last state election.

I cannot understand why the Premier would need to amend a motion of the Liberal Party which is actually a motion of his own words. I know why—because the Premier is caught. The Premier must have thought back and now does not agree with his own words; or there is an even more sinister agenda, that is, he will not agree with the Liberal Party because it is enunciating the Premier's words and supporting him. I am amazed that the Premier will not support himself because, in effect, that is exactly what the Premier will do by way of his cunning plan to amend the motion. We cannot wait to see exactly what is the amendment, but I do remind the Premier of what used to happen to Baldrick's cunning plans—they invariably fell down. I am quite sure that his amendment will have a similar fate in the long term, as indeed will the Labor Party.

I would like to hear a very definite and dot point debate from the Premier and the other ministers who have lined up—they must regard it as a quite important debate—as to why they will not accept our thorough support for their leader's own words. Why does the Premier need to amend the motion? Obviously his words were said purely as a politically emotive statement, not one that he firmly believed in. If we are the Smart State—and, interestingly enough, this theme is being encouraged in every department—and if the Premier is so smart, why does he need to change his own smart comments?

Mr Welford: That's a bit smart.

Mrs SHELDON: It is an interesting question, as the Attorney rightly said. I know the Attorney has some very good ideas about this, so I will be interested to hear how he puts them forth—perhaps he won't. We have the minister down for his ideas in full.

It is very important that the House and the government support our motion. We are prepared to support this Labor Premier's words. I would like to think that his party and indeed his ministers are prepared to support those words, but I have a great fear that the Premier will move an amendment that really means nothing at all purely to negate this very valuable motion that the Liberals are putting forth for the state this evening. Hence, I do support the motion. It is very important. It needs to be enacted as soon as possible, because it is nearly 12 months after the election and who knows when for political motivation this government may call the next election?
