



Speech by

JOHN ENGLISH

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

Hansard 17 October 2001

ELECTORAL [TRAVELLERS' ADVANCE VOTES] AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ENGLISH (Redlands—ALP) (9.17 p.m.): I rise to support the intent behind the member for Nicklin's Electoral (Travellers' Advance Votes) Amendment Bill. It is important to differentiate, however, between the intent of the legislation and the effectiveness of the legislation. If it were possible, I would definitely support legislation to mandate world peace. However, the realistic possibility of enforcing that legislation is minimal. The ability of the legislation to achieve the desired outcome is minimal. Therefore, it is silly to pursue that course of action.

The intent behind this legislation is to allow people to have a voice during elections, and I am sympathetic to electors who, due to travel engagements, are unable to cast a vote in an election. It is important to note that all legislation, however, needs to achieve a balance. In this case it is a balance between the rights of a person to express their views by way of a vote and the fairness of the system. Unfortunately, this bill has many flaws. It is extremely vague in its wording and in how it intends to achieve the desired aim of giving expression to people's voices and their opinions.

In his second reading speech, the member for Nicklin said that the whole point of these votes is to allow an intending traveller to lodge a just-in-case vote before the election. A just-in-case vote! With the current system of how elections are called, a just-in-case vote could be cast at any time after any previous election. We do not have fixed terms, so the Premier can call an election at any time that he sees fit. So to cast a just-in-case vote before the election implies really a collection of proxies. And just for the benefit of the National Party, the Liberal Party and any Independents, I point out that I am quite happy to accept as many proxies as they wish to send my way. I will quite happily endorse them. So the vagueness in this legislation is its major flaw.

In his second reading speech the member for Nicklin stated—

Perhaps the names of extra candidates requested by the elector could be added by hand—this is the kind of thing for which details could be provided by regulation.

That is a return to the vagueness of the Joh era—'Don't you worry about that. We'll sort it out.' No, it needs to be expounded in the legislation. The intent of this bill is to allow people to vote for candidates who are not even nominated. That is insanity of the highest order. How can people vote for candidates who have not been preselected or for parties that may not yet exist? I find it incredible that that kind of detail is not explained in the legislation. We just cannot leave it at, 'Don't you worry about that. We will finetune that in the regulations.'

Certainly in this legislation there is an implied bias towards sitting members. As sitting members, we have the luxury of being known in our electorates, depending on how hard we work.

Mr Springborg: Sometimes that is a disadvantage.

Mr ENGLISH: Certainly I can understand that concern for members on the opposition benches.

The electoral process is about fairness to all candidates. It is not about a perceived bias or even a real bias to any sitting member representing whatever party. This legislation damages that objectivity. There are no candidates nominated; there is no preselection process nominated. If people elect to cast a vote, are they voting for a party? Are they voting for a person? The officers of the Electoral Commission are not mind-readers, and it is not their aim to try to get into the minds the voters. Were voters who, before they travelled overseas, cast their votes for Pauline Hanson when she was the

Liberal Party candidate voting for the Liberal Party, or were they voting for Pauline Hanson? It is not appropriate for the Electoral Commission to try to get into the minds of the electors.

The legislation is fatally flawed. I have stated it and I will state it again that I cannot begin to understand how someone going overseas can cast a vote for people who have not been preselected as candidates. Those people are just casting a vote for a party which, as I said, implies a collection of proxies. If any members of the National Party or the Liberal Party wish to send me their proxies, my address is in the book. I will quite happily collect those proxies for them.

Earlier the member for Southern Downs said that he would quite happily listen to solutions. He admitted that the bill was not perfect, but, to his deluded mind, it was the best that he could find. I ask the member for Southern Downs to please listen carefully, because he is about to hear the solution. The solution to the problem caused by people travelling overseas and not being able to cast their vote is four-year fixed terms. Let us get the members of the opposition on side to support this initiative for four-year fixed terms. That way, every four years everyone in the state of Queensland knows when they are going to the polls. They can arrange their travel times around that date. They will know that in four years time, eight years time, 12 years time or 16 years time to the hour, the day and the minute when nominations for preselection will close. People will know when the election is going to be called. I ask the members opposite to jump on board and support four-year fixed terms for parliaments. If they are serious about trying to solve this problem, they will jump on board.

Although I support the intent of this bill that was introduced by the member for Nicklin, its logic is just bizarre. I cannot support it. I have offered the members of the opposition the solution, and that is four-year fixed terms. I ask them to jump on board.
