



Speech by

KERRY SHINE

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Hansard 17 October 2001

ELECTORAL [TRAVELLERS' ADVANCE VOTES] AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (9.06 p.m.): According to the speaker's list for this debate I was to follow the honourable member for Lockyer. I was keen to know before I spoke the attitude of One Nation to the Electoral (Travellers' Advance Votes) Amendment Bill. I say that because my recollection is—I stand to be corrected—that both the member for Lockyer and the member for Tablelands, if not the member for Gympie, would have been nominated as their party's representative for their respective seats well within that six-month period before the closure of nominations. My recollection is that in Toowoomba the One Nation candidates were nominated within a week or two of the closing of the nominations for the poll. It would therefore be interesting to learn of their attitude. A similar point was made by my friend concerning the position of the honourable member for Surfers Paradise.

I am pleased to hear that the Liberal Party will be opposing the bill. I concur with the remarks of the honourable member for Robina. He described the proposition in the bill as being inherently unfair. I concur with that 100 per cent. Indeed, it would open a Pandora's box of potential electoral irregularities.

So far we have heard a couple of members speak in support of the proposition of the honourable member for Nicklin. Most notable, I suppose, was the member for Southern Downs, representing the National Party here tonight. His speech was curious, to say the least. He concentrated on the fact that he was not convinced that this piece of legislation is the best way to achieve its aims but that at the very most it gives us something to work with. He said that at some unspecified time in the future one should seriously look at real alternatives. I thought that the conclusion to those sorts of remarks would be that the National Party, for the time being, would oppose the bill or would come up with serious and well thought out alternatives by way of amendment. However, that is entirely unlikely, bearing in mind the remarks of the honourable member for Southern Downs.

The National Party is a bit disappointing with respect to this subject matter. Even the member for Southern Downs was not on the list of speakers. In other words, no National Party members were listed. At least we did hear from him—albeit half-heartedly in support. It is not as if the National Party, with its resources, has not had time to give proper attention to this bill. As we all know, it has been on the *Notice Paper* for some lengthy period.

The member for Surfers Paradise indicated that he would be voting in favour of the bill despite what he regarded as the great complexity of the bill. He also was prepared to look at other alternatives in the future. At best one can say only that he was unconvincing in his support of the proposed legislation.

As I see it, the bill raises the subject matter of a balance—or a contest, if you like—between, on the one hand, giving people every possible opportunity to vote in any imaginable way in an election and, on the other hand, maintaining the integrity of the voting system. The present position is outlined in the explanatory notes to the bill, but I will not bore the House by reading those out. I suspect that might be adequately covered by subsequent speakers tonight. However, the present position, as we are governed in Queensland by the Electoral Act of 1992, points out the various methods of voting, particularly in relation to voting other than on the day at the polling booth.

Also, the explanatory notes set out the difficulties that were referred to by the honourable member for Nicklin in his second reading speech. He pointed out the example of the three couples, I think, who approached him just before they were going on an overseas trip and where their itinerary

was uncertain. I think we can understand those circumstances. In my limited experience as a member, but having been involved in a number of elections, I have been approached similarly, as have other members who have mentioned that fact tonight. So we do understand the motive for bringing forward this legislation. And in a sense the motive itself is quite commendable from my perspective.

The proposal under the act is to bring in a travellers' advance vote, being a kind of declaration vote as is described in more detail within the act. The curious thing about it is that one would have up to six months to cast that vote, provided that the election was called within six months of the casting of that vote, as I understand it. As the member for Everton has indicated, the government will be opposing the bill, not surprisingly because of its principles with respect to matters of electoral integrity and fairness.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SHINE: I am very proud of our record in that regard. The recent events over the past 12 months indicate the determination of this government, the Beattie government, to do everything beyond the call of duty, if you like, to ensure that there is fairness and honesty in the electoral process. In fact, the government believes that this bill threatens the very cornerstone of the existing legislation, which is based on fairness and maintaining the integrity of that system.

One of the reasons why it is unfair is that voters are going to be treated differently. They are going to be given different ballot papers. They are going to have different persons and different parties on those ballot papers for the same election. In reality it will be voting by imagination. And that, in this day and age in the 21st century, is hardly maintainable. I believe that the system as proposed will lead to uncertainty. There would be unknown and anonymous candidates. And there may not be any election called at all. That is certainly not in our Queensland tradition.

The concern about the enhancement of fraud has been referred to, and I agree with those remarks. One of the real problems associated with the bill is the secrecy surrounding the method of voting, which is alluded to in the warning itself. That warning casts doubt on the effectiveness of the manner of voting. Certainly the warning itself refers in a sense to the complexity. The warning is complex, and I agree with the member for Surfers Paradise in that regard. Whereas one does appreciate the sentiments expressed for the introduction of the bill, I strongly agree with the government's position in opposing it.

Time expired.
