



Speech by

Hon. R. WELFORD

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Hansard 5 December 2001

FOUR-YEAR PARLIAMENTARY TERMS

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (6.40 p.m.): As long as I have been in this parliament, I know of no other time in the history of this House where we have had a greater preponderance of opinion in support of four-year terms than we have at the present time. As the Leader of the Liberal Party has said, there may be no better opportunity than in the near future to put to the people of Queensland the proposition of a four-year term.

This debate is not the normal 6 o'clock debate conducted in this House. Members should see tonight's debate as an opportunity to exchange ideas—variations on the theme—as a way to work towards a consensus and achieve what every member knows to be an important opportunity for this parliament and for the government of the state. It may be that there are some reservations legitimately held by the Leader of the Opposition and some of his members. I urge the Leader of the Opposition not to see tonight's debate as a combative debate where opposing views are held in entrenched positions but, rather, as a debate where views are simply canvassed across this parliament—members, as individuals and as party members, canvassing ways of working towards a consensus on this issue.

Increasingly, members of all political parties are coming to the view that this state needs a parliament that can work effectively, a government that can plan, a political cycle that is stable and predictable, and certainty for voters as to when elections will be held and for other sectors of the community—particularly the business and private sectors—so that investment decisions and other decisions are reflective of the political process.

There are a number of important factors which support this. I have already mentioned the stability of the political cycle. The private sector has previously made submissions to the Queensland Constitutional Commission, and the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry made the following submission—

Business relies upon consistency and/or predictability in government policy and decision making processes to plan for future business paths and activities. The business sector requires a long-term perspective to be developed and implemented. Given this, QCCI supports the implementation of a four year term in Queensland. The Chamber believes this move would lengthen the period in which the State Government was not in election mode and so able to primarily govern.

We also need the opportunity for coherent economic planning. Back in the days when this was first mooted in 1929, three years was a very long time in politics. The nature of the nation and the nature of our community was such that things moved much more slowly. Three years was a long time within which decisions were made. These days the political processes of government are so complex and the world is moving so fast that three years is not enough time to get on top of some of the complex issues of the day and for governments to formulate good policy and have it implemented in an appropriate way, without one eye to a pending election.

We need to avoid decisions that are made for political expediency, yet we know that is what happens with a three-year term. Beyond the settling-in period that the member for Surfers Paradise mentioned, there is a very short window before governments turn their mind to the next election. Good policy and good government decision making is often compromised by the pressure of a pending election within three years—often much less than three years. These are all factors that members will mention in this debate tonight. However, the real question for members of this House is how to come to a consensus on how to achieve what we all know to be a basis for better decision making and better

government in our state. The question is not just whether the Premier does or does not stick to his word—and that is a legitimate argument—the real question is: can this be won? I say to the member for Robina that, frankly, the question really is that we need to hold this referendum when we believe it can be won. There is no point holding it just because the Premier says so. We should hold it when we believe it can be won.

That means we should hold it when we have in this House a negotiated settlement between the Liberal Party, the National Party, the Independents, One Nation and the government about how to achieve effective change of our parliamentary process in the long-term interests of Queenslanders. The opposition is entitled to address the question of cost, but a one-off cost may be the sort of investment which can be saved in future elections, and we can talk about when the referendum can be held to minimise that cost.

Time expired.
