



Speech by

**DESLEY SCOTT**

**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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Hansard 11 April 2002

**ELECTORAL AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (6.46 p.m.): This legislation will make our Queensland electoral system more transparent, democratic and accountable while preserving freedoms and ensuring the integrity of our electoral rolls and our voting system. This legislation may have been borne out of a painful period for our government. However, it is designed to address many practices which are now recognised as less than ideal when viewed by the general public and indeed our own branch members. When I look around this House, particularly at my own colleagues in government, I see hardworking, honest members who have the welfare and progress of their own area of the state as their foremost interest and goal. I therefore must conclude that, although we are tightening up our electoral system, if the calibre of members in this place is an indication, our system has delivered us a wealth of talented members and I feel privileged to be a part of this government.

No discussion on this bill could take place without the acknowledgment of the leadership shown by our Premier in the face of an extraordinarily difficult period. To say that our Premier does not shrink from tough decisions is an understatement and, although I personally felt a lot of pain through that period, I have very much been a beneficiary in that I have been given the opportunity to represent the people of the Woodridge electorate in this place, a position which gives me a great deal of satisfaction and delight. The people of the Woodridge electorate are salt of the earth people—no pretentiousness, a wonderful sense of community and a care for each other seldom witnessed in this very fast-moving world. I thank my constituents for giving far more to me in return for my time and energies than I could ever have imagined.

When I view the world at this time, it is clear to me that our right to vote is a very precious right, one which many people throughout the world have sacrificed their lives for. Australia is a unique country. My electorate in particular has in excess of 150 different cultural groups represented, many of which have absolutely no democratic voting rights at all in their own countries. The tough new penalties outlined in this legislation will demonstrate the high value we as a government place on the rights we in this country enjoy. The bill states that we take very seriously any action of giving false or misleading information, forging or uttering electoral or referendum papers, voting when not entitled or bribery, and that we are prepared to imprison for up to 10 years, depending on the seriousness of the crime, anyone willing to tamper with our democratic electoral process.

Those convicted of a crime under this new act will also face a ban disqualifying them from nominating as a candidate or even holding membership in a political party for 10 years. While speaking of branch memberships, it should please many that members eligible to vote in a preselection ballot will now be required to satisfy eligibility to vote in a general election, thus nullifying some of the branch stacking witnessed in other parties that occurred on a grand scale with voters having their citizenship in far-off countries.

It is only right and proper that those who have a say in who our elected representatives will be should live in the area and be eligible to at least vote for the endorsed candidate. We in this House are all aware of the role played in past elections of preference deals and how elections could be won or lost on the issuing of a how-to-vote card. This section of the bill sets out clear guidelines which will make for a fair and transparent race, no secret deals and availability to the public prior to election day. I concur with the seven days prior to election requirement of lodging how-to-vote cards and the banning of how-to-vote cards not formally declared.

All through the election process, the independent Electoral Commissioner will take on an enhanced advisory role and will be empowered to conduct random audits. When we view the larger picture of political parties and their disclosure responsibilities as well as how they conduct their overall campaign, their breaching their electoral responsibilities will result in their losing public funding.

I applaud the additional funding and greater role foreshadowed for our Electoral Commission, with data matching, encouraging greater participation in the electoral process and, most of all, its supervisory role throughout the electoral process. I congratulate our Premier on his leadership in this issue and also our minister, the Hon. Rod Welford, and his staff for such a comprehensive set of proposals which I am sure will lead to greater integrity in our electoral system.

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