



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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DRAFT CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ELECTION CANDIDATES

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (6.22 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to speak in this debate to endorse a Draft Code of Conduct for Election Candidates. Why would not every member of this House support it? Honest people should have no problem supporting such a code. I think in the day-to-day workings of government this is one item of interest which the people of Queensland would unanimously agree is important, that is, that we have free and fair elections.

From the outset, I would like to say that I am fully supportive of this draft code, which seeks to maintain public confidence in the electoral process by promoting conditions conducive to the conduct of free and fair elections. Interestingly, it was only last month which marked 15 years since the Fitzgerald inquiry changed the face of Queensland. Stories of corruption once filled the news, but I am pleased to say that reforms resulting from the Fitzgerald inquiry have gone a long way to restoring the integrity of government.

With the introduction of the Electoral and Other Acts Amendment Act 2002, wide-ranging reforms were also introduced to restore public confidence in the electoral system. Building on these reforms, this code of conduct will bind state candidates to behave with the integrity and honesty which is expected of a person who holds public office. With an election due next year, this code will raise the bar and expectations of candidates to ensure that they conduct themselves appropriately. For this reason, the draft code is particularly timely—timely because new candidates across the political spectrum will be eager and hungry to win their seats and their place in this parliament. Of course, with this comes campaigning.

What I see as the basis of this code of conduct is an honest election process from the start of the election campaign right through to sitting here in this House. Some key points include strict rules on access to public funds by political parties, bans on convicted electoral offenders, clean and accountable government, enrolment and voting reforms, full public disclosure and tougher penalties for people who break laws relating to elections.

At this point I think it is important to note that this code is essentially voluntary, with, of course, the exception of matters pertaining to antidiscrimination, official misconduct and Electoral Act offences. But it really speaks for itself that candidates who do not follow or do not abide by this code will risk disfavour in the electorate. With this comes the possibility of not being elected because they have not followed the code. I do not think there is a candidate for election who would want to risk that. Hopefully, by its very nature, the code will maintain and strengthen public confidence and discourage inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, resulting in better candidates and better campaigns. This will culminate in better government for the people of Queensland, because a member's first responsibility is to the voters who elected them to public office.

While the code will bind only Independent and party endorsed candidates for state government elections, I join with the Premier in encouraging members of the Commonwealth parliament and also local government members to consider adopting the code or a version of it. I think every member of this House can see the benefits of this motion and can recognise the importance of this code of conduct in ensuring that candidates uphold appropriate conduct. I am very pleased, therefore, to support the motion.