



Speech by

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Positive Politics Agenda

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.29 a.m.): I was very disappointed in the response from the Premier this morning to our positive politics agenda. I tried to enunciate to the parliament this morning that, as far as we were concerned, there would be many opportunities over the coming weeks and months where we would be able to question the government on some of its deficiencies in administration. Unfortunately, this morning the Premier came into the chamber and indicated by his response that he was not prepared to engage us in a new way in this parliament.

I was particularly disappointed when I asked him a question with regard to whether he would give an absolute guarantee that there would be no negative advertising in the next state election by the Labor Party in Queensland. He equivocated on that. At the Premier's first chance to be able to bring Queensland into a new era of election campaigning, he fails. Let us be honest. In the past, all sides of politics have used negative election campaigning. I do not think that that has done anything whatsoever to advance the cause of the body politic or the way in which the electorate at large views us as politicians, political parties and members individually. That is why I was able to secure unanimous endorsement from my party at our recent state management committee meeting that there will be no negative personal advertising from us at the next state legislation. If we identify a government deficiency, then we will also identify at the same time the way that we propose to fix it.

I was particularly alarmed because only a week before, when I was able to secure that I become the leader of the National Party, the Premier enunciated to Queenslanders at large that there was, in his view, a need to have negative advertising against the Liberal Party and the National Party in Queensland similar to the last time. That is very, very unfortunate. The Premier is starting to run scared, because he knows that the best way for us to be able to beat him in Queensland at the next state election is for both parties to come together and work closely. The Premier went out there with some form of ruse and basically said, 'If they don't give you a choice of Liberal Party and National Party at the next state election in each seat because they have got this deal'—because we have resolved the issue of three-cornered contests—'we might have to run these negative ads.' I implore the Premier: let us get away from that style of politics. This morning, the Premier tried to indicate that he is going to talk about his record. If his record was good enough, then that record in itself should speak volumes and should be good enough for him to get elected on.

This is about us bringing Queensland into a new era of politics. We reserve the right to be critical of individual government decisions, as the Premier reserves the right to be critical of the things that the opposition may do. But the point is that that criticism needs to be targeted and done properly. Negative election advertising is something that we should all commit to ruling out. I was disappointed, and I intend to pursue the Premier with regard to that issue.

The other thing is that the Premier has been going around Queensland saying that he believes in fixed four-year terms. It is interesting to note that, in the time that I have been the leader of the Queensland Nationals, only one person has raised the issue of four-year terms with me. Only one person has raised the need for the Premier to extend his term. That was the Premier. In response to his letter, I said in seven points that if we are going to go along and negotiate with him on this, then we will need some guarantees on accountability. What is wrong with accountability? What is the fundamental problem with agreeing to greater accountability mechanisms? There are some fundamental issues that the Premier would need to address. Firstly, Queensland does not have an upper house. I am the last

advocate for a return of the upper house. Secondly, the Premier has attacked access to freedom of information in this state. We have to wait three or four months to get even the most meagre amount of documents, and there is the cost of it. If we are going to have an accountable government with an extended term and no upper house, we have to have more accountability mechanisms. So the government would have to reinstate the freedom of information regime to the way that it was before—and even to tweak it to make it better—to make sure that governments would be able to continue to use the cabinet exemption process to hide information that it does not want to release. It is not the release of information that gets them; it is the cover-up. That is something that we all need to be basically aware of.

Today, the Premier ridiculed the notion that the opposition needs to be better resourced and funded. There is one official opposition in Queensland that does its job. After the last state election when the coalition was not renewed—the opposition consisted of the National Party—the Premier cut the budget of the official opposition. I am dealing here with the official opposition. The computations and the permutations of it do not matter: the official opposition needs to be resourced to make sure that the government is accountable. The government cut it. It cut the number of senior positions that we could have from five to two, it reduced our office space, and it reduced the number of staff by about six. That is not done in a democracy. The Premier has indicated that if the National Party is able to form a coalition with the Liberal Party, then he may look at reinstating those conditions. But he has missed the entire point and that is that, if the government has a four-year term environment, it should maintain its belief in democracy and a properly resourced opposition.

I did not rule out negotiating with the Premier. I said that I would be happy to negotiate with him on that basis. He did not want to commit to extra accountability, because he knew that he could not deliver it. He knew that he had wound back access to freedom of information, he knew that he had gutted the resources that were made available to the opposition. The Premier wants everything his own way. If we are going to consent to negotiate and agree to fixed four-year terms, we need some guarantees on the part of the people of Queensland. We have not been given them to date, and we will continue to pursue getting them.

Instead, because many in the media supported fixed four-year terms as a principle but agreed that these issues should have been addressed first, what did the Premier do? He grabbed his sand bucket and his sand shovel, jumped out of the sandpit and ran away. I said all the way through that I was prepared to continue to negotiate. The Premier came out with a little quip that it was a clever way of Lawrence saying no. It is not. It is a way of saying, 'You will need to convince us that you are prepared to look at accountability.'

Today, if the Premier was serious about the advantages of fixed four-year terms then he would have agreed, when I put the question to him, to work on 28 February next year as the day of the next state election. The reason for that is that the government's term expires on 24 March. That is the date when the writs must be issued. That is when the term expires. Three days later we have the local government elections and a week or so after that we have Easter. The reality is that there are significant problems in having an election during that period. If we had a 56-day campaign period, the election would go into May. The Premier is not going to have a 56-day campaign period—nobody wants that; politicians or the community at large. So the reality is that we will be dealing with a 26-day election campaign. From a practical point of view, we need the election this side of the local government elections. That is why 28 February next year, two weeks post the three years, is reasonable.

All the Premier wants to do is to enunciate something that he believes in. But when the blowtorch goes near his belly, the Premier runs away. That date would have provided the Premier with an opportunity to do away with the speculation that will build in this state post June about an election at the end of this year. That happens. The speculation will build, the government will not be able to put in place its agenda and talk about positive things. The government knows how things go once an election campaign starts. If the Premier had said that today, that speculation would have been ruled out and we could all agree to go on and deal with the issues that Queenslanders are very, very concerned about.

Over the past week, we have also seen from this government a return to old-style Labor. First of all, last Monday we saw a broken promise with regard to the ambulance tax in Queensland. I can say more about that later and I will. We saw the Premier of Queensland imposing on the people of Brisbane his chosen Lord Mayor. We will see what happens at the next council election. We have also seen special deals for special mates with regard to Queensland First. The Labor Party has put out that information, and the Premier is trying to run away from it. The Labor Party has said that people will get special consideration if they donate and become a foundation member.

This morning, we heard the Premier defend the ambulance tax in Queensland. The Premier said that it was not a problem because if a person owns a pie shop, it will cost one cent more. If a pie is \$2.50, one extra cent makes that pie \$2.51. I do not know whether the Premier is aware that we do not have one cent coins and the price is rounded down. If the price is put up by five cents, then we have

profit taking and trade practices issues. The government has not thought through the process. We also have the late registration fee, which is another \$40 that is slugging motorists in Queensland. We also have the drivers licence failure fee. We have the bore licences which the government has imposed on people. We have all of these sorts of problems that must be addressed.

Time expired.