



Speech by

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION (APPOINTMENT ACCOUNTABILITY) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (8.36 pm): I am very pleased to rise to speak in the debate on the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation (Appointment Accountability) Amendment Bill and, in doing so, support my colleague the member for Caloundra. I congratulate him for bringing this important bill to the House. We are all well aware of the concerns that surrounded the appointment of the latest Information Commissioner and I do not plan to go into those in depth here as those arguments have been well canvassed in this House prior to today. The important thing that I will say is that what was taken from that whole scandal was the difference between the way the Information Commissioner is appointed and the way other statutory positions are appointed.

When one considers the nature of these positions it is important to outline that, above any other positions, the Information Commissioner, Auditor-General and Ombudsman should be appointed using the highest level of accountability and the highest level of transparency. This should be done in a bid to provide these positions with the high opinion and respect that they deserve. To adapt the well-used legal axiom: the correct appointment must not only be done but the correct appointment must be seen to be done.

This is the whole point. This is not a go at the current people holding these positions. This bill befits the importance of the role and positions being discussed. This bill provides a level of transparency for the positions of Information Commissioner, Auditor-General and Ombudsman that lets the people of Queensland see that the correct appointments are being made. When I refer to correct appointments I am referring to appointments that are based on merit. This will ensure that the most suitably qualified people are found for these positions. The test is: what would an objective observer, who has knowledge of the roles and functions of these positions, think of prospective candidates for the positions? In other words: who would an informed, objective, non-aligned observer pick?

We all know that these positions are deeply rooted in the political make-up of this parliament. The appointment of these positions is very much in the hands of people in this House, this political crucible, and those political scientists or advisors who stand within close proximity. To be able to find someone so far removed to apply the above ideal test is fanciful and gullible. So, working within the confines of what we have, this bill comes up with a mechanism for providing bipartisan support for a particular candidate. That is, both sides of the political landscape, free from bias and favour, choose the person who is most suited to the job.

It is very easy to knock this system, and that is because it is much easier to choose not to do something than it is to adopt something new. It may be easy to pick holes and say, 'What about this and what about that?' However, this bill provides a level of transparency that has many rungs on the ladder above the current situation. I again commend the member for Caloundra for bringing this forward.

The government is always very intent on telling Queenslanders that it is open and accountable, that it is completely transparent. Unfortunately, it is not always keen on showing it. With all of the documents being pumped through cabinet, the administrative difficulties in getting FOIs and getting a straight answer out of ministers in this House, it can be like extracting teeth. Here is the perfect opportunity to show the

people of Queensland that it is serious about transparency. How much time have we spent in this House arguing and bringing up the fact that the government's processes are incorrect, that it is appointing jobs for the boys, that there are underhanded deals going on and that more time is spent by those ministers opposite telling us why that is not the case and why these appointments are justified?

Here is the government's chance to do two things. First, it has the opportunity to show the people of Queensland that it is serious about transparency and that it is serious about doing what is required to ensure that the integrity of these positions is not only upheld but also seen to be upheld. If that is not a valid enough reason, it has the opportunity to stop parliamentary debate about these appointments because both sides of the House will have had input into the choice.

I am privileged to serve on the Public Accounts Committee. I remember last year being ushered into the room just off the chamber here where the committee, chaired by the member for Greenslopes, was advised of the new choice of Auditor-General. Despite the fact that he is a very fine choice and is doing a great job, it did make me think later that there had literally been no input from the non-government side. If there had been I am sure that the same decision would have been reached, but it just would have given the non-government side a sense of completeness as to the process. Surely in the interests of devoting parliamentary time to tasks that require parliamentary time, this process would ensure that both sides are happy and one less thing needs to take up important question time. I commend the bill to the House.