



Speech by

Peter Lawlor

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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GOLD COAST CITY COUNCIL

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (11.55 am): Over the past few years I have worked hard in the Southport electorate. Much of that work has consisted of doorknocking and letterboxing and I have sent out literally tens of thousands of letters. I have had a flood of responses and suggestions relating to many subjects and issues. However, the issue which has received the greatest attention is the Gold Coast City Council, the circumstances of its election in 2004 and continuing allegations that it is dysfunctional. Other government members and candidates that I have spoken to have had similar responses.

Until recently I have resisted calls for the sacking of the council as basically I believe that a democratically elected council, in the absence of some exceptional circumstances, should not be dismissed. I certainly do not believe that an administrator appointed in the situation where a council is dismissed can carry out the functions of the council adequately. The suggestion by many people is that the administrator be appointed until the next local authority elections in March 2008. Some Gold Coast residents believe that 25 years ago when the then local government minister, Russ Hinze, sacked the old Gold Coast City Council and replaced it with an administrator things worked very well. They are wrong. Although things did work well for some people, including Russ Hinze—he had his application for twin high-rise residential towers on Burleigh Hill approved within weeks. I doubt that an application for high-rise buildings in a residential area would have been approved by an elected council. I do not consider that the appointment of an administrator is a good substitute for a properly elected council.

I am therefore calling on the Premier to consider, if re-elected, bringing forward the Gold Coast City Council elections to 2007—next year. This would mean that the first term of a newly elected council would be up to five years. It would be pointless to have another election at the time of the next local government elections in March 2008. The council would be elected for the remaining months of this term plus four years for the next term. Subsequent elections would then be synchronised with the normal local government election cycle.

It was only in recent years that the local government term was three years. This was extended to four years by the Beattie government. There is also a precedent for this as Rob Borbidge, when he became Premier, brought the Gold Coast City Council elections forward. In March next year the Gold Coast City Council would have served three years, the term that used to be the norm for local authorities.

In my speech on 30 March I mentioned the absolute contempt that the council has shown for its 3,500 workers in enterprise bargaining negotiations. I mentioned that whilst the CEO and departmental heads were granted a pay rise of \$50,000 per year, they were negotiating to reduce or remove conditions and allowances for ordinary workers. This is how Australian workers will be treated under the new John Howard IR laws. I was contacted by many of those workers but no councillors about the enterprise bargaining negotiations.

There was actually a ballot conducted which has now concluded. I have here a copy of the ballot paper. There is no certification on this ballot paper; one just votes yes or no and puts it in a ballot box which is located at libraries and depots and so on. There is no information about the enterprise agreement

details, although I am told that that is available if requested and is also on the web site. The ballot is open to abuse. It closed yesterday at 9 o'clock. All that is needed to rot this ballot is a supply of orange A4 paper and a photocopier. Hundreds of fraudulent votes could have been cast. It is a Keystone cops type of ballot.

On the issue of water, many councils and residents in south-east Queensland have blamed the state government for failure to plan and build necessary infrastructure, notwithstanding that water supply is a responsibility of local authorities. The Premier's announcement this morning will make water supply the responsibility of the state government, which has committed funds for desalination of water and for the raising of the Hinze Dam on the Gold Coast, notwithstanding that the Gold Coast City Council makes \$80 million a year from water, which goes to subsidising the general rate. That would be okay if the water infrastructure were up to scratch, but it is obviously not. The \$80 million made from water each year should be put back into water infrastructure. So I am calling on the Premier to bring forward the Gold Coast City Council elections to 2007 and give the residents and the 3,500 council workers the opportunity to pass judgement on the Gold Coast City Council.