



Speech by

Hon. Andrew Fraser

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CANDIDATES FOR STATE ELECTIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Local Government, Planning and Sport) (6.43 pm): The government will oppose the Local Government (Candidates for State Elections) Amendment Bill introduced by the National Party. We have opposed this bill in the past. We will continue to oppose whatever attempts the opposition makes to continue to prosecute this same argument because the arguments in favour of the position of the Queensland government remain as they were in the past and remain equally relevant to the debate tonight.

The argument that is being put forward by the shadow minister for local government, the member for Warrego, is this. If the member for Warrego wanted to contest the federal seat of Maranoa at the next federal election he would be required under the Commonwealth Electoral Act to resign his seat from the state parliament in order to contest that federal seat.

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr FRASER: Once more for those in the cheap seats. If the state member for Warrego wanted to contest the federal seat of Maranoa at the next federal election the member for Warrego would be required to resign his state seat before he so contested. In that regard it is clear, logical and equally democratic that if the mayor of the Diamantina shire wanted to contest the state seat of Warrego the mayor of the Diamantina shire should equally and appropriately be required to resign his seat before contesting the state seat.

The bottom line is this: democracy requires those people who are elected to office to honour the commitment they gave when coming to office. The bottom line is this: democracy is best served in circumstances where those people who contest a seat, whether it is at a local government level, a state government level or a federal government level, honour the commitment that they gave to the community and to residents to serve in that office.

Local government is a number of things, but local government should not be a platform, a stage or the first rung on a political social climb for people who want to contest other levels of office. Ultimately, in circumstances where one elected representative wants to contest another seat democracy requires that that person puts their money where their mouth is. If it is a councillor's ambition to serve in a higher office then it is quite appropriate and democratic—as democratic as it is under the Commonwealth Electoral Act for a state member to have to resign a seat before they contest a federal seat—that a councillor who wants to contest a seat at a state election be also required to resign their council seat before contesting the state election. The logicity of the argument is clear. The democracy underpinning the argument is clear.

The suggestions that will no doubt be put forward by members from the opposite side as they make their contributions to tonight's debate will relate to the cost of elections. The answer to the issue about the cost of elections is really clear. All elections cost money—absolutely. But is it value for money? In my view, yes. Because I do not know the alternative to not having elections for office in this country. The notion that

we should move away from having elections based on their cost is one of the first arguments that is advanced by those people who ultimately are not interested in democracy.

Of course elections cost money. Of course local government elections cost money. Of course state elections cost money. Of course federal elections cost money. But that money is there to provide us with the people who serve in office at each and every level of government. As far as humanly practical it should be the case that in each of those circumstances, whatever level of government, the same principles underlie it.

Local government wants to be the third tier of government and should be the third tier of government in my view. It is the equal of the state and it is the equal of the federal government. In that regard there should be no question, no worry and no concern on the part of anybody in this parliament with the notion that the rule that applies to those of us in this House who want to contest a federal seat should apply to those councillors who want to contest a state seat.

This parliament has debated this issue on many occasions and the debate has also been resolved in one way—that is, that the position of the Queensland government is clear, it is democratic and it is right. The arguments that will be put forward by the opposition tonight will be many and varied, creative but essentially illogical. The bottom line is this: ultimately the view of the National Party and the opposition on this issue is always the same—that is, fundamentally they believe that it is in their political interests to have this issue, not in anyone else's interests. Their political interests are not what is relevant to determining proper democracy and legislation in this place. The government has opposed this move in the past. We will oppose it again tonight. The government opposes the bill.