



Speech by
Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (CANDIDATES FOR STATE ELECTIONS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6.49 pm): I rise to support the Local Government (Candidates for State Elections) Amendment Bill 2007 as introduced into this parliament by the member for Warrego as a private member's bill. As the minister indicated, this issue has been debated in this House a number of times. It is relevant to reflect on the fact that the message from the government has always been constant. It has always been one of envy and hatred for local government. It was envy and hatred that had this legislation introduced into parliament in the first place.

Those of us who have been here for a little while will remember that it was the former member for Chatsworth, Terry Mackenroth, who introduced that legislation and it was very vigorously supported by the member for Logan and people who felt themselves threatened by local councillors. It was simply about protecting their own political patch. It was about protecting themselves from challenge that saw that legislation introduced into this House. That justification has been put forward each time it has been introduced. It was obvious again tonight in the short address given by the minister for local government, because it has become very obvious in recent months that the Beattie Labor government hates local government. It hates local councils. It hates the proud record of achievement that they have got. It envies local government for its stability and its record of achievement because it stands in stark contrast to the record of failure that the Beattie Labor government has chalked up in the years it has been in office.

Point me if you will to one example in local government that comes close to rivalling the collapse of the health system. Give me an indication of where local government has failed anything like the failure of the Beattie Labor government that has brought about the water crisis or the crisis in child protection or the problems that we see with public transport and traffic management here in south-east Queensland. The litany of failures that the state government has chalked up in its term of office stands in stark contrast to the stability that local governments have been able to bring to the communities that they represent. That is the essential issue that has led to the latest attack on local government that we have seen the government trying to pursue over the last three or four weeks.

The matter that is the central issue of this bill is also aimed at protecting the government's political future. This was about stopping local councillors from challenging sitting Labor members. It was about attacking what Terry Mackenroth, the former member for Chatsworth, and the current member for Logan saw as the area where a lot of conservative politicians came from to challenge their power base. They saw local government as somehow a training ground for conservative politicians and they set out to put a stop to it. So great was their insecurity that they set out to put a stop to it. They set out to deliberately make it more difficult for people to gain experience in representing their communities and then go on to represent the wider electorate in state parliament.

That was the course that brought me to this place, and I am very proud of the fact that I served in local government. It was a good apprenticeship. I would suggest to the minister for local government that if he had served a similar apprenticeship—if he had served a few years in a council somewhere—he would

have been much better prepared for the role that he now has. Rather, his apprenticeship was in the young Labor club out at the university and the union offices—

Mr FRASER: I rise to a point of order. I was never in a young Labor club in any university.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr English): There is no point of order.

Mr SEENEY: I withdraw. The minister never had an apprenticeship at all, and that too is very clear by his performance in the role. But I say to you, Minister, quite sincerely that you above anybody else in this place would have benefited from that sort of apprenticeship. If the minister had served in a role in a local authority somewhere, he would have learnt a lot more about local government and been a lot better prepared to play the role that he has today.

This is an issue about fairness. It is an issue about ensuring that people have a fair go at winning the honour of representing their electorates and their peers in this place. To single out a particular group of people and make it more difficult for them is something that can only be justified by those who feel some sort of a political threat, because what the legislation currently does is to single out that one particular group of people, and it is quite unjust. I am not suggesting for a moment that it should be extended to other groups of people, but one might ask why it is not. Why is it just limited to local government councillors that have to resign? Somehow or other they have to resign their job. Public servants do not have to resign from their job, and nor should they. Let me make that very clear: nor should they. I am not suggesting for a moment that they should, but there is an unfairness in that this legislation is targeted against local councillors. It stems from this assumption that we have seen put forward in the last three or four weeks that somehow local government councillors and mayors are politicians—'bloated politicians' the Premier called them. In fact, that is demonstrably wrong. It is demonstrably wrong. In many communities, across regional Queensland especially, those people work in a semivoluntary capacity for their community. They are much closer to being community workers than they are to being politicians, and that is something that the Labor members who promoted this legislation were never able to accept and never able to realise.

The best support for this bill tonight comes from the Labor Party itself. I will table a copy of this when I am finished reading from it, but it is a report in the *Courier-Mail* of Monday, 2 April. It is headed 'Labor says councillors can stay while campaigning'. It is a report about the Labor Party's attitude to its councillors who are standing for a federal seat. It is completely at odds with all of the arguments that have been advanced in this place for this concept that we are seeking to reverse tonight, and I want to quote it. It says—

The Labor Party has played down claims it will order several Queensland candidates to quit their local government posts to contest the federal election. ALP State President Milton Dick yesterday gave Brisbane city councillor Kerry Rea and Gold Coast councillor Eddy Sarroff permission to keep their positions while campaigning.

That says it all! That says it all! There is no commitment in the Labor Party to this concept when it affects it—no commitment at all. It is prepared to allow its members who are councillors and contesting a federal election to keep their positions, and so they should by the way. I believe they should keep their positions too. The Labor Party is of that opinion when it suits it. But when it comes to protecting its seats here in the state House it takes a completely different view. It is not prepared to engage in a democratic process, but it seeks to try to thwart that process by making it more difficult for local councillors to stand aside—make it more difficult for local councillors to run for office and force them to resign.

The other issue is the issue of what it costs. If one looks at the last state election, it cost councils over \$1 million to conduct the by-elections that were necessary following the state election. This is a government that has come into this place for the last three weeks and in the public debate and bemoaned the fact that local governments do not administer their finances properly and do not manage their money properly, yet to maintain this false concept it requires those same local governments to waste \$1 million in by-elections because of this philosophically driven legislation. This legislation is out of date. It needs to be fixed up. The members who were the proponents of it are gone. The former member for Chatsworth, who pursued this with an absolute paranoia, is no longer a member of this parliament. I think we need to realise that the legislation is unjust, it is unfair, it needs to be rectified and we can do that tonight. I table the document.

Tabled paper: Copy of an article in The Courier Mail, dated 2 April 2007, titled 'Labor says councillor can stay while campaigning' by Martin Phillip.