



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

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ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (2.39 pm): In April this year the Premier advised the House that the government would be introducing a number of changes to the Electoral Act to fit in with changes proposed by the federal government to increase accountability of candidates in elections and political parties throughout the year. The major changes that the Premier foreshadowed in April have been incorporated into this amendment bill before the House. These include the tying of public funding to actual verified electoral expenditure claimed and approved by the Electoral Commissioner. This brings Queensland's act into line with the proposed Commonwealth bill, and we have heard from the member for Southport about the reasons why that bill will be a little bit delayed. We have had a similar provision in Queensland before, but this strengthens the obligation to provide documentary proof to the actual expenditure and allows the Electoral Commissioner to refuse claims that do not provide adequate verification.

In federal elections in the past there have been allegations that candidates have made money out of public funding. Particularly for Senate candidates, they have in the past received funding based on the formula for a certain amount per vote. This was paid whether they spent the money on their campaign or not. Pauline Hanson was criticised for this and it is wrong that taxpayers' money should be diverted to line the pockets of failed political candidates who do not even particularly try, especially those who might try to use a brand name that has been established in the past and hang it around their neck on reality television shows to continue that brand's life and then turn it into making an extra quick buck when it comes around to election time. This provision therefore ensures that there is a correct degree of accountability attached to public funding for elections.

Under this new provision a candidate or political party first must reach the threshold of at least four per cent of the vote. This is the vote required for the return of the deposit paid by candidates and reflects a reasonable vote for an Independent or minority party candidate. The strength of our democracy depends on the greatest level of participation possible in the election process and candidates should not be discouraged from standing by setting the threshold way too high. Once this is attained, then the amount to be received is calculated as the lesser of the two prescribed amounts. These are the amounts arrived at by applying the formula to the number of votes cast for the candidate and the actual verified expenditure claimed and accepted by the Electoral Commission.

But as a fundamental democratic principle it is important to know who is donating what to which political party. This allows us to make informed decisions about what type of government we want to see in this state. We can decide whether large donations from a particular person will have a tendency to influence the policy decisions of the particular party. This makes me wonder: what do you do when you are Australia's second richest person—a multibillionaire—and it comes to acquisitions?

Mrs Pratt interjected.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Houses and cars can seem like mere trinkets in that situation. In the case of Clive Palmer, whose personal wealth is estimated at a staggering \$6.5 billion—

Mr Wendt: How much?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: The figure is \$6.5 billion. It is quite staggering. I understand the amazement in the reaction from the member for Ipswich West. But in that context in the case of Clive Palmer and that staggering wealth, it seems you look for some more ostentatious accoutrements. In Clive Palmer's case, you start looking for things like football teams and political parties. But in Clive Palmer's case you do not just start looking; you do something about it. So far Clive Palmer can tick both of those boxes. He has bought himself a football team in the form of the new Gold Coast franchise in the A-League—so there is a tick there—and now he has bought himself a political party in the form of the new Liberal National Party here in Queensland—tick.

Mr Copeland: How much did he donate to the ALP?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: We will all know under the arrangements set out by the amendments to the act. This positions Mr Palmer for his ultimate acquisition, the ultimate bit of billionaire bling—a government! In his case he will be wanting to acquire the Queensland government. Now, we have known that some big miners have owned different Queensland governments in days gone by, but this is going to be the ultimate bit of bling for Mr Palmer. It is very clear that if the Liberal National Party was elected to the government benches in this place Clive Palmer would be able to tick that box. In the meantime, to use a horseracing analogy that I am sure the member for Southport would appreciate, it is a sure bet that as the owner of the Liberal National Party he will be issuing the riding instructions.

That is why these amendments to the Electoral Act are so important—to get information in a timely way about the extent of donations being provided. It will be interesting to see just how much money it is revealed that Mr Palmer is kicking in. Mr Palmer has made it clear that he is ready, willing and able to turn on the money tap and that money is no object when it comes to the support of his new party. Mr Palmer admitted as much himself the day the new Liberal National Party was formed when he stated—

All of my personal assets, my jets, everything are all available for the party any time.

This was the very same day that Liberal Party life member and former member of this House Mr Bill Hewitt commented—or perhaps more precisely lamented—

We've been seduced by a billionaire with a couple of million dollars to spare.

This all reminds me of newspaper reports from the mid-1980s when planning minister Russ Hinze overruled the Landsborough council decision to knock back a town house development. Hinze overruled the council decision just eight days after it was made. According to newspaper reports at the time, a company associated with Clive Palmer was undertaking the development. His day job at the time was as the National Party media director. Media at the time put to Mr Palmer why he did not appeal the decision in the Local Government and Planning Court. His response was that this was way cheaper. Liberals at the time criticised the decision, with then Liberal Landsborough shire councillor and candidate for the local seat Councillor John McCaw saying—

In your wildest dreams State Government departments don't move that quickly.

No surprise then that, in that two-for-one deal that the member for Southport referred to, Mr Palmer now wants to buy out the Liberals, as it was also reported at the time that Mr Palmer had been expelled by the Liberal Party in 1975. So he is buying his way back in now. At the time that Russ Hinze did approve that development, Mr Palmer was reported as saying—

All this just highlights that the Liberal Party has got nothing. We don't care what they throw at us.

So he will just be getting it all back now with his wallet.

Mr Lawlor: With interest.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: Indeed; with interest. He will be coming back to take it all over. With this attitude and form in relation to accountable and transparent operation of government, what can we expect from a Clive Palmer owned and operated Liberal National Party government? The member for Southport has addressed these questions to some extent for the House, particularly in relation to questions around mining policy. I think he made some very salient points that we should all give regard to.

But this government is committed to ensuring that the people of Queensland should make informed decisions about whether this is the type of influence they want exerted over government and over government decisions. We will ensure that any donation over \$1,000 is reported. These reports will be required to be lodged every six months so that Queenslanders can keep a watching eye over the donations being made to candidates and political parties. The special reporting requirement for gifts of \$100,000 or more is a special provision which is unique to Queensland and shows our absolute commitment to transparency. Large gifts are more likely to be the subject of community curiosity because large gifts could be seen as an attempt to influence policy if not accompanied by the most stringent of disclosure provisions possible, and that is where the amendments to the act are so important and that is why we introduced this bill. We are also providing for returns to be lodged within eight weeks. This applies

to donors and political parties and will apply to the regular reporting requirement as well as to the reporting required after elections.

This bill provides Queenslanders with the sort of accountability that they deserve from their potential politicians. We want people in this parliament who are prepared to open their financial affairs as they relate to the election process to the scrutiny of all the people of Queensland. We want people in this parliament who have nothing to hide and this bill delivers that in spades. The bill enhances the democratic process for us all and I commend the bill to the House.