



Speech by

Hon. Judy Spence

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Hansard Wednesday, 28 October 2009

CRIMINAL CODE (HONESTY AND INTEGRITY IN PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. JC SPENCE (Sunnybank—ALP) (8.01 pm): This is the third time we have debated this issue in the parliament—in 2006, and we debated this very same bill in November last year. I have had the opportunity to look over the speeches that were given on the last two occasions and, indeed, the last sitting night when this bill was debated. Anyone who reads those speeches would have to agree that there has been a lot of boring repetition, and not much that is new has been said about the subject since 2006, when we originally debated it.

I am happy to add my contribution tonight. I have had a good read of those speeches. One thing that every single one of us in this parliament agrees on is that members of parliament should operate with honesty and integrity at all times. What we obviously do not agree on tonight and on previous occasions is what penalties should apply to a member of parliament if they happen to tell a lie, to tell an untruth, in this place. On our side of parliament the government believes that the existing sanctions are sufficient. The previous member talked about those existing sanctions, and they are very clear. If someone is deemed to have lied to parliament they will be referred to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! I ask you not to use the word 'lie', please.

Ms SPENCE: Absolutely. If the minister intentionally tells an untruth in this parliament, under the Westminster system that minister is obliged to resign from the ministry. If members are seen to do the wrong thing in this place, they are also judged by their peers, the media and, of course, the Queensland public at large every three years in an election. Our side of politics believes that those existing sanctions are sufficient. We do not have to impose criminal penalties and jail sentences for a misdemeanour such as telling an untruth in this parliament.

As members of parliament we sit here day in, day out formulating laws with penalties that cover all manner of offences in this state from drink-driving to more serious offences. The Queensland public would honestly question whether a seven-year prison sentence is truly something they want to see imposed on someone for telling an untruth. If we asked people out there in the general public that question, they would say that that is not an offence that warrants the sentence. The people of Queensland, of course, are not stupid. When we ask them to think about those things, of course they will say that you do not lock people up for that kind of matter.

Fundamentally, that is the only difference between the two sides of this debate, as it has been on previous occasions. Should someone be jailed for seven years for telling an untruth in this House? We say they should not. Does it happen in any other parliament? No, it does not. It does not happen in the House of Representatives or the Senate; it does not happen in any other state parliament in Australia; it does not happen in England in the Westminster system. It would be something unique to Queensland and something that this side of politics believes is unnecessary.

I am not going to speak for a long time in this debate, because I think so much has been said. We have even reached the low point of a lame poem being included here tonight. I see that we do have a long speaking list and it is likely to be a late evening. I would remind people that this is something that has been debated in the past—something about which we do not need to hear more tedious repetition tonight. Queenslanders, having considered this matter on two previous occasions when it has received a lot of media attention, will agree with our side of politics that the existing sanctions that are imposed on members of parliament who inadvertently—or even knowingly—tell an untruth in this place will suffice.