



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 28 October 2009

CRIMINAL CODE (HONESTY AND INTEGRITY IN PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—LNP) (9.13 pm): I appreciate the encouragement that I am getting from those opposite.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order! Before you start I want to remind all members that if they wish to interject they should return to their seats.

Mr MESSENGER: This will be an interjection-free zone for the next 10 minutes or so, I am sure!

I rise to wholeheartedly support the Criminal Code (Honesty and Integrity in Parliament) Amendment Bill. I commend the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Surfers Paradise, for introducing this piece of legislation. It boils down to the fact that, even though there are only a few shattered shreds of credibility left in this government, the government and senior members are on the line with this debate in this parliament tonight. We all know—it is an open secret—that the Premier will not be the one leading the Labor Party to the next election. I advise those opposite who have aspirations to lead the Labor Party to the next election that they should be very careful about how they speak and also how they vote on this bill.

The people of Queensland have no doubt as to why we need to introduce the offence of providing false evidence to the Queensland parliament. Primary school children who visit this chamber have no difficulty understanding why members should be held accountable for providing false evidence before the House or one of its committees. In fact, I think there is a doormat outside that understands why politicians should not be telling mistruths in this parliament or before its committees. The only people who do not seem to understand that fact are, unfortunately for the people of Queensland and the people in their electorates, those opposite. In fact, what we have seen tonight in the debate is almost a celebration of it. They arrogantly flaunt it. They have no shame. They have no fear of telling mistruths to this parliament, and that is the reason this bill should be passed in this parliament tonight.

Their reaction actually shows how out of touch and how delusional they have become because they have been in power for too long. It is the 'baby's nappy' theory of politics, and I am sure honourable members have heard of it. Like political parties, babies' nappies build up their own hubris and every now and again they have to be changed to be cleaned out—get rid of all the bad stuff. This is what needs to happen in Queensland. I hear those members ask, 'What is a little untruth to parliament between friends? Is there any lessening of standards?'

It is approaching four years since the state Labor government recalled parliament and voted to stop the referral of former health minister Gordon Nuttall to the DPP despite a CMC investigation and its recommendation to take that matter before the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. In the debate it became quite apparent that Mr Nuttall had very, very strong friendships and commanded great influence with many Labor ministers and many members opposite. If anyone should doubt how Premier Bligh and many of her Labor ministers regarded or felt about the former health minister, they only have to study *Hansard*, which is quite an instructive, incisive document. It is worth repeating tonight. The Premier said—
... for those of us who have sat with him around a cabinet table and know him to be a decent man ...

The Deputy Premier, who was in here ranting earlier—and I am sure you would have caught the performance, Mr Deputy Speaker—said—

I know the member for Sandgate well and I believe that he is a good and honest man.

Former minister Warren Pitt said—

I stand here today and attest to the good character of the member for Sandgate.

Mr SHINE: I rise to a point of order. There is a standing order which prevents repetition.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr SHINE: The repetition does not have to come from just one person—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Please take your seat. That is not a point of order. The member for Burnett has the call.

Mr MESSENGER: I thank you for your protection from the member for Toowoomba North. He obviously does not want to hear what is coming next; he may have heard it before. Former Minister Tom Barton said—

I know this man very well, possibly better than anybody else in this parliament today. I want to vouch for his honesty and integrity and his values.

The then member for Greenslopes, Gary Fenlon, made one of the greatest comments of all. He said—

The member for Sandgate is one of the greatest members who has ever entered this parliament. He is an honest and decent human being.

It was like a three-ring circus. I remember the day well. I do not think that you were there, Mr Deputy Speaker. It was December and Christmas was just around the corner. This parliament, led by Labor numbers, gave the member for Sandgate a great big Christmas present. They let him off the hook. They gave him a get-out-of-jail-free card.

A government member: He is in jail.

Mr MESSENGER: I will take the interjection from the member opposite. Yes, he is in jail, but we had to rely on the law of karma rather than the law of this parliament to put him behind bars. It was only because of a freak set of circumstances that he ended up there.

Mr Horan: He is not in jail for lying to parliament.

Mr MESSENGER: No, he is not in jail for lying to parliament. I will take that interjection.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order! You will withdraw those comments, member for Burnett.

Mr MESSENGER: I withdraw. I was provoked by the member for Toowoomba South.

Mr Horan: I should have said he's not in jail for being untruthful.

Mr MESSENGER: That is right. Once again the credibility of this government and its senior leaders is on the line. Perhaps the Premier should be reminded that her credibility is on the line. She is the member of state parliament who publicly defended Nuttall by saying, 'For those of us who are colleagues of the member for Sandgate, for those of us who have worked with him, for those of us who have sat with him around a cabinet table and know him to be a decent man...' One can draw only two conclusions from that. Either the Premier knowingly misled parliament when she gave those references or she did not. If she genuinely thought that Nuttall was a decent man, what does that say about her judgement? What does that say about the judgement of those opposite who were not deliberately misleading parliament?

Mr Johnson: She went to an early election, Robert.

Mr MESSENGER: Yes. The Deputy Premier was in the chamber before. At the time he said—

I know the member for Sandgate well and I believe that he is a good and honest man.

How well did the Deputy Premier know Nuttall? Did he know him well enough to know the details of the government contracts that Nuttall had charge of? Has he ever been interviewed by the CMC about any of the information regarding Nuttall? Maybe the Deputy Premier would like to volunteer that information when he is researching all his speeches. Will he be contacting the CMC and volunteering information?

Mr REEVES: I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Burnett, take a seat please. Pause the clock.

Mr REEVES: I refer the House to the sub judice rules because some of these matters are before the courts.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The member for Burnett has the call.

Mr MESSENGER: In closing, we have to ask ourselves why we need a restoration of standards in this place. It is because this place is a place of life and death. If we make good decisions in here, people live; if we make bad decisions, people die. If we allow mistruths to be said in this place, people will die.

That is the bottom line. Tonight we are trying to raise standards and protections for all Queenslanders, including Queensland children and Queensland families. We are not doing the right thing by the families of Queensland if we do not support the raising of standards and the introduction and passing of the Leader of the Opposition's bill.

This place is falling about our ears because this state is going to hell in a hand basket. Our public debt is climbing to \$87 billion and it might be \$100 billion by the end of this week. Who knows? How can we trust the people opposite to tell us the truth? We cannot. We cannot trust them because they have lost the trust of Queensland emphatically. If this bill is not passed tonight, it will be another demonstration of the loss of that trust.