



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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MINISTERIAL AND OTHER OFFICE HOLDER STAFF BILL; INTEGRITY REFORM (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL; PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE BILL

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (3.07 pm): Like all other speakers, I find it very hard to respond to this bill without laughing. This is a cognate debate of three bills addressing ministerial officers, integrity reform and public disclosure, which have been introduced by the Premier. All are suboptimal. What is not funny is that it is being delivered by a person who is the Premier of our great state, with its 150-year history of democracy—from an amazing convict colony beginning built on the basis of accepting the worst rejects that Britain felt it no longer could place—and the Premier thinks integrity is a statement that one can claim without living it. Has history really repeated itself such that a government could have become both so disconnected from the public and so brazen that it has destroyed all the trust the public has been persuaded over years to place in it?

In all fairness, this first bill addresses the legislative framework for employing ministerial staff, the justification being, in the Premier's own words in her second reading speech, 'reflecting the differing and quite separate roles of ministerial staff and public servants'. The Premier has gone to some lengths to explain the powers, roles and responsibilities of those staff. She explains that they are not empowered to direct public servants in their own right. I agree with the intention of the bill with regard to these staff.

It also says that, although they have different roles and have a different role to ordinary public servants, their own personal security is linked inextricably with that of their masters. They are truly the servants of their masters, not the public, and their political masters are the government. Their appointments are made by the director-general, the Premier and the cabinet on the recommendation of the Premier, the opposition leader and, in only a few cases, a member of the parliament. One would almost wonder how they feel when each poll result or public survey is announced. Are the fluctuating fortunes of those in the public eye only just a fraction of the greater scene, with an enormous group of support staff watching, listening, sensing, living and breathing every last word or action of their political masters?

Of course, some of these special people just accept whatever fate may befall them, good or bad. The difference between success or failure depends on whether their member or minister connects with the public or remains in the political favour of those in leadership. What often seems to be lacking is the credibility or capacity of the minister or member, for it is perception that rules the day. Sadly, it is just that, the day: who won the day, not really who lost, for if one won then the others either lost or were just ignored. To be ignored repeatedly is to be forgotten. To be forgotten is to be irrelevant. A ministerial staffer's job swings on that balance in the wind. In some cases of perceived or real transgression or crime, some staffers are persuaded to accept blame and exit stage left.

This bill is the response to a Labor minister getting stuck and her adviser being left to improvise with the public servants who he faced. This morning's *Australian* has named Simon Tutt as about to be exonerated. Maybe he felt like this when he was faced with the pressures and he was not certain what to do. The pressures can be just too great. For all this wonderful work, either nothing works or seems to work

and their own lives become so difficult with strained families and relationships that grow distant as they try to please their masters.

Certainly on our side of politics I remember Greg Jackson very fondly. Some may also remember him in the same way. He had many of the fine traces of people who loyally give all of themselves, often to their own peril. Maybe when they have no more to give, their own lives seem worthless and because their own futures are so inextricably linked to their masters, they lose control of their own lives and destiny.

I realise that modern political machines cannot seem to function without such people. It is, indeed, timely that this bill attempts to implement a framework of ethical behaviour, including declaration of interest, codes of conduct and application of the CMC and other judicial instruments. What is tragic is that there are two groups, one supporting the current Labor government of the day and the other spartan supporting the organisation.

Irrespective of all these ridiculous statements by the current government about the best resourced opposition, we have a state Labor government which employed a vast army of journalists, media advisers, hacks and hangers-on. After 12 years of continuous governing and a diminishing ability to employ anyone just to try to plug every leak, the walls are fracturing and morale is failing. Most are wondering what will happen when the music stops, for inevitably it will and their jobs will be gone. For others who feel they might be able to claim Public Service status, their fear is irrelevance, a generation of non-government, and, for some, a gulag—leftists and communist created gulags. So the thought is all too close to home for these people.

The second bill is the integrity reform bill. It is very difficult not to support anything that purports to be implementing integrity reform in Queensland. This bill is primarily to deliver a single code of conduct for the Public Service. It would be wrong to say that everything the Premier comes into parliament with is just a cynical vote-buying exercise to save her from both political oblivion and public long-lasting acrimony. However, to introduce this bill the day after she was unable to claim the third anniversary as Premier, when she endured group after group challenging her right to serve as leader, sweet 16 is the new jingoistic theme. We are all to believe she has never been kissed before, either.

What is wrong here is the obvious disconnect between the word 'integrity' and this current Bligh Labor government. It is very difficult to reform something if you cannot get your own house in order. Everyone has a favourite integrity quote, but the one that embraces all is that integrity is what we do, what we say and what we say we do. On any level the public has ceased just grappling with what went wrong with Labor; they just want to get rid of them for nothing they have done is what they said they would do and Labor has done many more terrible things in Queensland on top of that.

It would be incorrect to say that the state Labor government has not looked at responding to integrity and accountability in Queensland, but the response is marred in looking for ways of escaping the clutches of rules fairly imposed and ignoring the rest of the world on the issue. Labor in Queensland has decided it is so virtuous because they claim year on year that not only did Tony Fitzgerald rid our state of old-world governance, they remain his champions 20 years later. The true situation is really very different. Tony Fitzgerald's assessment of the current Labor government is summed up in his own words as saying access can now be purchased, patronage is dispensed, mates and supporters are appointed and retired politicians exploit their connections to obtain success fees for deals between business and government. We are not talking about a few ex-Labor mates; there are buildings full of them and a vast amount of state cash being shovelled their way.

For any perceived failing of the National Party in government, at least the bulk of the funds built our roads, hospitals, cities and social infrastructure. All this lot seem to build are monuments to themselves. They eat at trendy restaurants and they travel to far-away places on expense accounts that, in the most recent case, delivered a payroll system that was formerly called Paris—interestingly, it was a European trip—that could not even deliver for our health workers and destroyed the morale of current Health staff. It was implemented as Workbrain under IBM and SAP.

The concern is raised further in this bill because of the lobbyist register and the inconsistent approach being adopted in various ministers' officers and departments. There are very few changes currently that would seem to reassure anyone that Labor has changed anything other than forcing Terry Mackenroth from his position at the Gold Coast SuperGP. Far too much largesse and excessive slush funds have been taken out at the beginning of major state projects and it has to stop. Labor hacks were masquerading as facilitators in this process. It is not transparent and the lobbyist register will enjoy the LNP's close scrutiny.

It was 'last resort Laurie Connell' in Western Australia who made success fees a fine art. For those who may not know, he collapsed a Labor government, put a Premier and his ministers in jail and died in strange circumstances. The effects of his activities have consequences even today. Have any current Labor members considered any of this when dealing with such people as have been named in parliament today, including Jim Elder, who was named in the Shepherdson inquiry? As usual with anything to do with

Labor, the critical information lies in the bill and not in the second reading speech. In this bill there are significant numbers of acts to be amended. Rather than going through each one myself—and I think the opposition leader has done that very well—I will constrict myself to the contentious areas and relating those where I have particular interest.

The proposed amendments to the Civil Liability Act 2003 allow for an apology to be made without an apology being able to be regarded as an admission of liability. This is at best looking after the state's common liability. At worst, it is a 'get out of jail free' pass, maladministration, manifest incompetence and recklessness.

The Patel Bundaberg Hospital disaster, as detailed in the Davies inquiry and as continues on today, is testament to what we need to do about how we need to approach people very decently and look after their interests. That is the state's role. Also I cite the Health payroll crisis, with this dubious program previously named Paris, which was found to be faulty by most overseas companies, was renamed Workbrain, sold to us under IBM and SAP and has basically delivered nothing for our Health staff.

The Public Interest Disclosure Bill is the whistleblower bill. It has been discussed extensively by the opposition leader and I will restrict myself to the issues that I think are salient. The Premier believes the former bill is expanded upon and for the first time in Queensland it will provide protection for disclosures to the media in particular circumstances. The bill is either just backsliding or may be just a little more sinister in delivery because the Public Service Commission is composed of government appointees in the same manner as are the department chief executives. This is beyond that problem of Caesar judging Caesar, which has been raised today. This is not a question of security or anonymity. However, what incentive is there for staff to raise issues of major concern with such a panel? After taking such action, the whistleblower has to take their own action to enforce the protective liability provisions. I think the bill takes two steps sideways rather than going forwards.

In many ways these cognate bills are really quite cynical and sickening. This is exemplified very clearly by the Premier's statement. In her second reading speech she stated—

As the way in which government business is done continues to evolve and change, so, too, must our governance structures evolve and change ... This bill is therefore an important next step in this government's continued commitment to a contemporary and robust integrity and accountability framework.

However, the public does not trust the government. They do not believe the Premier and, whether or not the Labor government believes it, the public was not told about asset sales and does not believe the Premier is truthful. Once lost, trust is not easily recovered.

Last night on the ABC, *Australian Story* broadcast a wonderful story about Michael Ware, a war correspondent. He made the amazing statement that there is no truth in war, for war is the consequence of loss of trust. If war is also the consequence or the result of failed diplomacy, does this mean that the current Labor government is a failure and its diplomacy with its constituency and the wider populous is also a failure? Is that why the Queensland public took to federal Labor with baseball bats at the last election and, after not getting what it wanted, that is, a change of government, the mood is ill required? I wonder if what is waiting out there is nothing short of utter annihilation for state Labor? I think that is the case. The polls are getting worse and suggest that that will occur.

No self-induced Labor crisis will save the incumbents or the staff supporting them, for this series of bills is about those staff. Currently, nearly all newspapers in Australia rate the Premier and Treasurer as the worst Queensland leaders ever and they will be reviled forever. Self-talk in a protected environment means little. But what of their staff? What of the true believers, cynics, modern leftist revolutionaries, Labor diehards and the many who genuinely believe in the greater good of what they are doing for their masters? Undoubtedly, some are probably still celebrating the near-death experience of a first-term Labor federal government and wondering, 'What if?'

In *Hocus Pocus*, Kurt Vonnegut, the deceased American author, wrote—

During my three years in Vietnam, I certainly heard plenty of last words by dying American footsoldiers. Not one of them, however, had illusions that he had somehow accomplished something worthwhile in the process of making the Supreme Sacrifice.

In other words, losing their lives. So it will be at the end of the Bligh Labor government, which is a reckless government in decay, made up of B-grade actors who are incapable of delivering anything of substance and, critically, who are illegitimate by virtue of failing to be honest when they stood for re-election. In the end, the foot soldiers wear the consequences of dishonesty. If these bills are to validate them, it is nothing more than hypocrisy. Shakespeare was right on the mark when, in *Julius Caesar*, he stated that integrity comes from within. He wrote, 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars ...'.