



Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 9 June 2010

MOTION: QUEENSLAND HEALTH, PAYROLL SYSTEM

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.20 pm): Tonight's motion is yet another example in a very long list of examples that demonstrate why the Liberal National Party are unfit to govern this state, why they have no understanding of public governance and why they have even less credibility to form an alternative government in this state. As Queensland's first law officer and the minister responsible for the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950, I feel compelled to correct the wild and unsubstantiated allegations and assertions that have been flung about by the LNP here tonight.

Commissions of inquiry have a very important role to play in ensuring that the public has confidence in the integrity of our governance and administrative systems and institutions. In Queensland, Labor governments view this role so importantly that for almost two decades we have established, sustained and supported a standing commission of inquiry—the Crime and Misconduct Commission—contrary to the position taken consistently in this parliament by members of the Liberal National Party. The CMC is ready and able to investigate any misconduct or failings in our governance systems in this state. It is not, however, a political football to be tossed about at any issue that the opposition seek to take political mileage from. And we know they have form when it comes to setting up commissions of inquiry for political purposes.

Royal commissions have served jurisdictions across Australia well, most notably in circumstances where an issue exists that warrants such special investigation where no existing authority has the authority to investigate and where no authority exists with the capacity to make rulings. But is this the case in Queensland? Quite simply the answer is no. The threshold tests—those issues that I have raised that would even warrant discussion of the creation of a commission of inquiry—have not even been touched upon by those members opposite. What is the most damning criticism of them is that the shadow Attorney-General—the man who purports to be responsible for the Commissions of Inquiry Act—did not mention the words 'commission of inquiry' once in his address to the parliament today. This is all lost on those members opposite. They are a lazy, policy-free zone who masquerade as an opposition and an alternative government in this state.

The payroll situation confronting health workers in Queensland is a very serious issue and one that the government has devoted very significant resources, dedication and commitment to resolving. As well as the immediate issues which the government is working hard to address, there are several other mechanisms in place to look at the systemic issues that may have contributed to this situation. What did we hear about the Auditor-General tonight? There was no support from members opposite. He is an officer of the parliament who reports to this body, this parliament, on issues that fall within his purview. But we heard no support for that process from those members opposite, as they do not support independent officers of this parliament, nor the CMC.

As I have said before, the CMC has the capacity to take action if there are any allegations of official misconduct or corruption. The opposition's motion tonight is typical of the policy contradictions and

confusion which reign supreme on the opposition benches particularly at budget time. What do we hear at every budget? What will we hear in the future? 'Government funding must be cut.' Yet what do we hear now? We hear a call for millions of dollars to be spent on an unnecessary inquiry which they seek to establish for partisan political purposes, and it would cost tens of millions of dollars.

What did the Australian Law Reform Commission say about royal commissions? They said—

Royal Commissions usually prove to be very expensive. Precise figures are surprisingly difficult to pin down, but we estimate that, in today's dollars, the Royal Commission into the Building and Construction Industry cost taxpayers over \$70M, the one into the collapse of insurer HIH cost over \$47M, and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody cost over \$50M.

We know what their Liberal National Party colleagues in Canberra did with the Cole royal commission into the building industry. They spent \$70 million on a partisan political attack on the trade union movement. They will do nothing less if they set up a political inquiry here. We have seen form from them. What about their disgraceful bill last year—the disgracefully titled Commissions of Inquiry (Corruption, Cronyism and Unethical Behaviour) Amendment Bill—that they put before this parliament? It was a bill that sought to direct me to create a commission of inquiry and, if I did not, they would go to the Bar Association of Queensland to set up a commission of inquiry. The Bar Association would have to nominate someone. Did they ever put on the record how they consulted with the Bar Association? Never, not once. Those members opposite seek to use commissions of inquiry for partisan political purposes.

This is nothing more than a rank political attempt to promote themselves in the community. There is no substance to their argument. They are a policy-free zone. The motion should be voted down and the amendment should be supported by all honourable members.

(Time expired)