



Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

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

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (3.50 pm): I rise to speak in support of these three bills being debated cognately in the parliament which are collectively referred to as the integrity reforms bills. In 2009 I was privileged to chair a number of community integrity forums throughout Queensland to seek public input into Queensland's integrity system and proposals for integrity reforms. I was hugely impressed by the passion shown by ordinary Queenslanders for the reform process—unlike what we have heard from the opposition; unlike what we have heard from the Independents. This government went out to the people and listened to what they had to say about integrity reform in this state.

I am pleased that the opposition leader is here because what we have heard in this debate is the modus operandi of the LNP writ large. What is that? Assertion without evidence, allegation without support and smears without substance. Speaker after speaker from the LNP came into this House and sought to smear these important integrity reforms before the parliament. I will talk in detail about these reforms. But we know the modus operandi of the opposition now. It is not based on fact or truth or substance, it is about the story. It is about getting their story right, bandying about allegations without substance or support, bandying about terms such as 'this corrupt government'. I challenge the opposition leader at the conclusion of this debate to go out onto George Street and to speak to people directly and to the media and to say that I am corrupt. I challenge him to do that. I challenge him to go out of the coward's castle that he turns this parliament into and I challenge him to say to the community that I am corrupt. I challenge him to do that because there is not one bit of substance to that allegation in respect of any member of this government or any member of the Australian Labor Party who sits in this space.

He was a man that came to the leadership of this political organisation with some credibility. They put him up there because they thought he was a man of some sort of credibility. He has shredded that in 18 months, as has been the history of the Liberal Party in this state.

Ms Nelson-Carr: He has lost the Liberal Party!

Mr DICK: I will take the interjection from the member for Mundingburra. The Liberal Party has been shredded. He has lost the Liberal Party. They have completely capitulated to the National Party. We expect denigration from the National Party because they know no difference. They have no reputation of integrity in this parliament or in the political system in this state.

Ms Nelson-Carr: It is an outrage.

Mr DICK: I again take the interjection from the member for Mundingburra. It is outrageous that they seek in this parliament to denigrate the Australian Labor Party and the members of this government without any substance; smearing blindly away because that is their tactic. They want to sneak back into government. I will say more about the sneaky tactics of the Leader of the Opposition later.

Last year we went out to communities all around our state—from Cairns to Coolangatta—to listen to what they had to say about integrity reform. Interesting ideas came out of that reform process in those forums. In addition to the public forums, Queenslanders were also invited to make written submissions to the discussion paper *Integrity and accountability in Queensland*. What did we get from the opposition? What was its submission? Some half-baked, undergraduate send-up of the integrity paper. It was lightweight, lacking in substance—apart from challenging the integrity of the electoral system in Queensland, somehow trying to delegitimise one vote, one value. We heard it again from the member for Southern Downs, the deputy opposition leader—we know he wants to be leader—who came into this House and said during the debate—

I think that a scrutiny of what happened during that time would reveal that there is something fundamentally wrong with the Queensland electoral system at the moment.

What part of the words ‘one vote, one value’ does the LNP not stand for? There was a time when the Liberal Party stood up for one vote, one value; when they stood up for democracy in this state. They were the political predecessors of the Leader of the Opposition but, of course, he has abandoned that in his craven pursuit for power. What is the LNP? The LNP is nothing more than an answer to the question of who would be the senior partner in a coalition government. It was their attempt to sneak into power in the 2009 election to address fundamental flaws in the coalition. What did they do? The Liberal Party sold out every last bit of political moral fibre to seek political power, and they put up a stooge as leader to cover their tactic. They will be seen for the weak, policy-free zone they are at the next election, and we will hold them to account.

The Premier announced a range of reforms in relation to the integrity discussion paper last year and we implemented them in 2009. There are further reforms before the parliament today, further substantial and significant reforms, none of which were acknowledged by the Leader of the Opposition who is in the House this afternoon. The Ministerial and Other Office Holder Staff Bill creates a separate framework to the Public Service Act 2008 for the employment of staff to assist ministers, the Leader of the Opposition and other non-government members of parliament. The bill also provides statutory recognition to the role of electorate office staff of members of parliament. I want to acknowledge them. I am happy to acknowledge the electorate staff who work so hard in my electorate of Greenslopes and who support me when I am working hard in this parliament and the community as the Attorney-General. I want to acknowledge them and I want to acknowledge the framework that we are putting in place to support valuable electorate staff. There was no acknowledgment from the opposition about the important work that electorate staff do. As with so many people and so many things, those opposite take them for granted. We do not, on this side of the House. We support them. This afternoon I acknowledge my electorate staff.

A number of the provisions of this bill are a statutory enactment of current administrative arrangements. For example, ministerial staff already provide a statement of interest pursuant to the ministerial handbook. There will now be a statutory obligation to do so. We are taking integrity in government and in the conduct of this parliament to a place not seen before in the history of this nation. It is now being reflected in the Commonwealth parliament by reforms that will be implemented there. Some of those reforms were implemented here 12 years ago when the Beattie Labor government came to power in 1998. I am glad the Commonwealth parliament is following the lead that this parliament and this Labor government took more than a decade ago.

There are a number of other provisions in the bill that I will not speak about in detail today, but they are very significant reforms. The Ministerial and Other Office Holder Staff Bill also makes provision for the Director-General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to develop codes of conduct for ministerial staff. Failure to comply with approved codes of conduct may amount to misconduct on the part of the ministerial staff member. Again we had a smear against ministerial office staff for undertaking appropriate training in the workforce in relation to bullying, harassment and a range of other activities. That is appropriate. The state government needs to be a model employer and staff should be regularly trained in those matters. I wonder if staff in the opposition office undergo the same training? I wonder if that is the standard that the Leader of the Opposition sets for opposition staffers? I wonder if he requires them to undergo training to ensure that he has a safe workplace? I wonder if he would put that on the record. If they do undergo the training, what does that say? Does that say that there is something wrong with them, that there is a flaw with those individuals? Of course it does not. It is someone being a good and proper employer. I note in his address to the parliament that the Leader of the Opposition made no comment at all about the training and the standards he expects of opposition staffers.

The second bill included in the group of bills before the parliament is the Public Interest Disclosure Bill 2010, which provides a framework for public interest disclosure and replaces the Whistleblowers Protection Act 1994. That act is 16 years old and this government is seeking to modernise and reform it, as we are seeking to modernise and reform so many parts of Queensland, including the Queensland economy. This is a very significant reform process that the Premier spoke about at length in her second reading speech. The bill will expand public interest disclosures made by employees of a corporate entity as defined in the Local Government Act or the City of Brisbane Act. We are expanding the coverage of the legislation. Under the new act there will be a range of ways in which an individual may make a public

interest disclosure and that is a very important part of the transparent form of government that the Bligh Labor government is delivering for Queensland.

We are also debating the Integrity Reform (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2010. If there is a single thing that condemns the Leader of the Opposition for his weakness, his lack of substance, his lack of intellectual ability and his incompetence it is his address to this parliament on the amendments to the Civil Liability Act 2003. I am the minister responsible for this act. This is a very significant law reform and the Premier deserves the highest commendation for leading the government in relation to it. It allows anyone in government and anyone in civil litigation to make an apology, to say sorry. Of course, we know how difficult it is for the conservative political parties in this nation to say sorry. For 11 or 12 years the Howard government could not once utter the word to the first, traditional and ongoing custodians of the land of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They could not bring themselves to do it. During the debate on the civil liability legislation the opposition leader said—

I turn now to the Civil Liability Act 2003. We were told by the Premier that the amendments to this act were 'to allow apologies to be made without being taken as an admission of legal liability'. We were then told 'this amendment will allow the government as well as any other person to acknowledge mistakes through an apology where the actions may have caused harm'.

I suppose the House should be happy for at least that acknowledgement from the Premier. The amendment is nothing more than an attempt to reflect in legislation the Peter Beattie political excuse and chest-beating process and give it legislative substance so as to facilitate media management and manipulation.

What a disgraceful address to the parliament. I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition reads this stuff before he stands up in the House and delivers it. I think it is written for him by the operatives of the National Party.

Ms Bligh: Operatives of the Police Union.

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the Premier. Anyone with any moral fibre or understanding of the legal system would understand how important it is for people to be able to say sorry and how important it is for victims of a civil wrong or those who have suffered a civil wrong to hear those words as soon as possible. That is what they deserve more than anything else. Even a brief reading of the explanatory notes reveals how the government defines the term 'apology'. It states—

It confirms that an apology is an expression of sympathy or regret, or of a general sense of benevolence or compassion, in connection with any matter. The expression may be an apology whether or not it admits or implies an admission of fault in relation to the matter.

How difficult is it for the opposition and the Independents to acknowledge that we should be able to allow people to express a general sense of benevolence or compassion at the very earliest stage when someone may have been the victim of a civil wrong, so that they can start the process of healing? That speaks volumes for the lack of leadership by the member for Surfers Paradise. I wonder what his constituents think about his performance in this debate.

A number of people have said that the government is corrupt but have given no substance or facts to support that allegation. Generic addresses were made to the parliament that the bill was fundamentally flawed, but we never heard any substance in those addresses. We only heard general assertions and general smears. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Lawrence Springborg, undermined one vote, one value. The government will look very closely at his comments, because it is a persistent position that he has held in this parliament last year and this year to undermine and question the integrity of the current electoral system. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition sought to somehow draw an analogy between the percentage vote and the number of seats in the parliament. I did not hear any members of the opposition, any members of the then Liberal and National parties, talk about the illegitimacy of the Howard government when Kim Beazley and the Australian Labor Party won a majority of votes in the 1998 federal election. I did not hear them condemn the illegitimacy of the Howard government and call for a new parliament to be constructed, because they fundamentally do not accept the constitutional arrangements and the electoral arrangements in this state, or the constitutional arrangements in our national system of government.

What have we seen today? As soon as a new national government was formed by members of the Australian parliament, elected under the Constitution of the Commonwealth and associated electoral laws, we saw Tony Abbott seeking to immediately bring down that government, which has the confidence of the House of Representatives, the historic chamber of the Australian parliament where governments are formed. They do not respect the legitimacy of the Constitution, the legitimacy of the parliament elected by the people of Australia or the legitimacy of the Gillard government. In their craven pursuit of power, they are trying to undermine the government of Australia. They will continue down that path, as they are the inheritors of the Fraser Liberal government that undermined the Whitlam Labor government, which was properly and democratically elected. They perverted the Constitution of the Commonwealth for their own ends. We will see the same thing in Queensland, and we will stand against them.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition talked about the need for independence of the opposition. These reforms are critical. Why? Because the opposition cannot be trusted. What does recent history show us? As soon as he took office, the Leader of the Opposition had his hand in the public till to plaster

his face around Queensland on billboards, contrary to the guidelines that bind his office. He was very happy to put his hand in the pocket of taxpayers to promote himself, contrary to the guidelines. All Queenslanders should be rightly outraged by that conduct. What happened? He had to get rid of his chief of staff. He did not sack him. Bruce McIver, the president of the LNP, had to come down and tell him what to do. He had to get rid of his chief of staff after he had doctored an email to try to justify what he had done in the nature of pure political self-promotion. Now we hear of his overseas trip that was so light on he had to refine it and review it and refine it again, to publicly justify the expenditure of money supposedly promoting Queensland. The initial itinerary showed that there were days when he was doing nothing except spending taxpayers' money travelling overseas. I think it is quite appropriate—it is more than appropriate—that the opposition be subject to the same sort of accountability as ministers of the state and members of the government.

We know that they want to sneak into government. We know that they do not stand for anything. We know that the Liberal Party has abandoned any sense of Liberalism in the state. They have abandoned their political inheritance. They have sold out to the National Party in a craven pursuit of power—led by a former member of the Liberal Party, the member for Surfers Paradise, and demonstrated by their shameful attempt to recriminalise homosexuality in this state during the debate on the surrogacy bill. In addition to abandoning their Liberal history, they came into this House to say that homosexual people not only were unfit to be parents but also should go to jail. They sought to recriminalise homosexuality. People such as the member for Surfers Paradise, the member for Indooroopilly, the member for Caloundra, the member for Moggill and the member for Clayfield came into this place and supported that sort of reactionary conservative approach. Not one of them had the courage of their convictions to express their conscience, and vote with the government on an important reform measure that will give Queenslanders the right and the opportunity to be parents. Many of those people have been denied that opportunity for a long time. We will not let them sneak into power. What they have done in this debate shows them up for the policy-free zone that they are, and also shows up the vacuousness that they stand for.

This is groundbreaking legislation. I am very pleased to have been part of a government that is improving the integrity framework in Queensland. It ensures that Queensland continues to lead the nation in the obligations it places on members of parliament, ministerial staff and staff of the Leader of the Opposition, as well as all Public Service officers. It is an honour—the greatest privilege of my life—to represent the people of Greenslopes in this parliament. I am pleased to have been able to play a part in ensuring that the representation they receive, as do all Queenslanders, is of the highest level of integrity and accountability.

I congratulate and commend the Premier again on her initiative in leading this reform process, in leading this government to take Queensland to the highest levels of integrity and accountability in the nation. These bills, instead of being objects of ridicule and denigration, which has defined what the opposition has done in this debate, are bills that all of us as members of parliament should be proud of. I commend them to the parliament.