




Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 11 May 2011

**ELECTORAL REFORM AND ACCOUNTABILITY AMENDMENT BILL;
ELECTORAL (TRUTH IN ADVERTISING) AMENDMENT BILL;
ELECTORAL REFORM BILL**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Minister for Education and Industrial Relations) (3.52 pm): I rise to speak to this important reform bill before the parliament. In particular, I want to speak to the government's reform bill, the Electoral Reform and Accountability Amendment Bill. In my view, the bills before the House moved by the opposition and the member for Beaudesert are misconceived and ill-conceived. I will defer to the Deputy Premier and other members on this side of the House to speak to the elements of those bills. I want to talk about one of the most significant reforms to electoral accountability and to the way our political system works in Queensland, basically, since we became an independent state. This is a very significant reform to bring openness and accountability to how our democracy works in Queensland.

Last year I had the privilege of touring the length and breadth of Queensland and speaking at various forums to Queenslanders about integrity and accountability in government. To a person, every Queenslanders holds very dear the issues of openness, transparency and accountability in government. They want and they expect members of this House to continually lift the bar and to continually let light shine on how the democratic system works, not to hide behind shady and unaccountable supporters of political organisations. I will say more about that in the debate. They do not want us to hide behind some cost impost.

Mr Stevens interjected.

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the member for Mermaid Beach. Everything that trade unions donate to the Australian Labor Party is declared in this state. However, to this day what has not been declared and what is not known is this: who paid \$20,000 a plate to dine with the Liberal National Party back in the days of the leadership of the member for Surfers Paradise? We know how close the member for Mermaid Beach is to the member for Surfers Paradise. He was one of his strongest supporters. When the can-do caravan came into town, we know what happened to the member for Mermaid Beach. What did he get plumped with? The shadow parliamentary secretary for racing, one of the leadership positions in the LNP—not! We know that when he was closely supporting the member for Surfers Paradise, he did not agitate for his leader to reveal who attended the \$20,000 a plate dinner. We do not know who went, notwithstanding the fact that at a press conference the then Leader of the Opposition, the member for Surfers Paradise, told the people of Queensland, 'We will reveal the names.' As I said at the time, he was perhaps the weakest and most craven opposition leader in the history of Queensland. Of course, he did not have the courage of his convictions to stand up and reveal the names. In this debate we are seeing that culture perpetuated. That is the culture that the Liberal National Party opposition wants to continue in Queensland. It is a culture of secret donations made behind closed doors and never revealed in our state. That is what they want.

There is a lack of integrity and credibility in the opposition. Not one of them has the capacity or the ability to lead their parliamentary party. Not one of them is willing to stand up for accountability, openness and reform in Queensland. Hard reform and hard change requires courage and this Labor government has that in spades. The courage of this government stands in stark contrast to that of members opposite. For two years they came in here, wringing their hands and furrowing their brows, talking about how corrupt and craven the Labor government was. However, when we have an opportunity to take a courageous stance to reform the way political parties operate in Queensland and to reform how democracy works, they run a hundred miles, a thousand miles, a million miles from the antiseptic light of sunlight. They do not want their backroom deals exposed to sunlight. Like Dracula shirking from the light, they run from transparency in politics. That is inbred in the establishment party in Queensland. They do not want their secret donations, their grubby little deals and their donors' names revealed to the antiseptic of light.

We will continue to lead the nation. It should not be forgotten that this is nation-leading legislation. This state will have the most open, transparent and accountable system of funding for political parties and political campaigns in Australia. It is a landmark reform. However, it stands in the continuum of reform that Labor governments have stood for in relation to integrity and accountability in government over the past two decades, and particularly under the Bligh Labor government since 2009.

Let us look at the achievements of the Labor government: banning the payment of success fees to lobbyists, introducing a legislative framework to regulate the lobbying industry, forcing newly appointed public servants and ministerial staffers to disclose whether they have worked as lobbyists in the past two years, instituting a regular people's question time allowing members of the public to directly question the Premier and ministers on any topic, reforming the Whistleblowers Protection Act to give greater protection to whistleblowers, establishing an ethical standards branch within the Public Service Commission, expanding the role of the Integrity Commissioner, announcing an overhaul of the parliamentary committee system to further improve accountability, publishing online the members' pecuniary interests register, expanding the jurisdiction of the Crime and Misconduct Commission to cover government owned corporations. We should not forget in the two years that I have been a member of the House and Attorney-General of the state the continual denigration and undermining of the Crime and Misconduct Commission by the Liberal National Party. They take every single opportunity in this House to undermine the CMC.

Let us look at what the member for Surfers Paradise did. He concealed his own dirty little secret within the LNP. To this day neither he nor any of the 32 members of the organisational wing will reveal that secret. We now know that the organisational wing is a body outside the parliament. It is an extra-parliamentary body that is unaccountable, undemocratic and unelected. It is unaccountable to the people of Queensland, but it is pulling the strings for the 32 members opposite. Not one of them will reveal who went to the \$20,000 a head exclusive dinner before the last election.

It should never be forgotten that this was the highest priced cash-for-access event ever held in Queensland political history, and to this day members opposite will not reveal the donors. Time and time again the member for Surfers Paradise promised to release the list. He has not done so. We have to ask: who gagged the member for Surfers Paradise? Who were the LNP money men interfering in the conduct of the member for Surfers Paradise by preventing him from revealing the names? Was it Bruce McIver, the President of the LNP, or was it their own sugar daddy, Clive Palmer? Who intervened and stopped him revealing that when he said publicly that he would do so? It is clear that the members of the LNP in this parliament have lost control of their own party. They do not control their own party. They are controlled by the external, faceless men of the LNP. Never in the history of the Australian Labor Party in this House—the long and distinguished history—

Mr Wallace: The ghost of Robert Sparkes is back.

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the Minister for Main Roads that the ghost of Robert Sparkes is back, reinvigorated in another form in the LNP. They are controlled by people outside this chamber. Not one of them has the intestinal fortitude and integrity to stand up. Now we see another force—Campbell Newman—pulling the strings, telling them how to dance in this place.

The government has a commitment to open and transparent government—one position. We promised reforms and now they are here. We have held our position consistently about reforming campaign finance and reforming the democratic system in Queensland by bringing about openness and accountability. We have a clear position, but when we look at the LNP we see that things are much murkier.

What did Campbell Newman say on 4 April 2011, as quoted in the *Australian*? Let us see what the candidate for Ashgrove said about campaign finance reform. The article states—

Mr Newman said he wasn't involved in the mechanics of fundraising and wouldn't be available for "cash for access" style events. "I will not be part of behind closed door meetings to an elite group of people paying for access," he said.

What did he say yesterday? On 10 May 2011 an article in the *Brisbane Times* states—

Liberal National Party leader Campbell Newman has declared he has no problem with cash-for-access political party fundraisers ...

It is incredible that within the space of one month the LNP candidate for Ashgrove, Campbell Newman, could not hold a position on a very significant and substantial public policy reform.

Ms Jones: Shame!

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the minister for climate change and sustainability. It is a shame. It is embarrassing. Frankly, it is disgraceful that he can say one thing on 4 April—that he is opposed to cash for access—and one month later says that he supports cash for access. Then today he says that these nation-leading reforms are ‘corrupt’. This man will stoop to anything, say anything and do anything. He is ‘can-do anything’ to achieve government in this state.

We know about the LNP style of democracy. It is changing every month according to what Campbell Newman says, and not one of its members in here has the courage or the fortitude to stand up to him. This is a return to the bad old days of the Bjelke-Petersen government when access was bought with cash in brown paper bags that were brought into the office and left in the foyer. That is what they want to return to. It is democracy LNP style, designed to suit the pockets of the privileged few and exclude the rest of Queensland. It is democracy LNP style: hosting dinners costing \$20,000 a head. That is the price of democracy for them.

Ms Jones: Name your price.

Mr DICK: Name your price; you will get a start for the LNP. They still will not reveal who paid the price at that dinner. We will never know because they will not reveal the list. They have never told the Queensland community who wants to purchase democracy and who wanted to purchase democracy on that night in March 2009. Democracy LNP style is buying a policy for \$16,500. That is the cost of democracy outlined by Craig Johnstone in the *Courier-Mail* in September 2009. Businesses were buying a place at the LNP table to develop party policy. Members opposite were not just listening but also taking cash to develop policy. It is shameful. What do members of the LNP do? Of course, they bribe people out of seats. That is what they did to Norm Wicks, a hardworking local businessman in Ashgrove who was duded out of the opportunity to run for the LNP in the seat in which he lives, by way of backroom deals with the LNP.

The type of democracy advocated by this side of politics, by the Labor Party, is not based on a person's wealth, their standing, where they sit in society or their patronage. It is based on one vote, one value. Every Queenslanders is equal before the law; every Queenslanders is equal in democracy. However, it does come at a price. The budget for running this parliament alone is \$76.5 million a year. Running the parliamentary precinct, this great chamber of history in our state, costs \$32.1 million a year. Members' salaries and entitlements cost \$44.4 million a year. Running the Leader of the Opposition's office costs the budget \$3.19 million. It is up almost 10 per cent—up from \$2.9 million—in one year alone but we never hear one of them saying, ‘That is the cost that we will cut. That is the price we will pay for democracy.’ No, they pick this number—\$30 million or \$26 million—out of a state budget of \$40 billion, to ensure openness and transparency in our state.

The electorate allowances for every one of the opposition MPs—what has the electoral allowance paid for all of them?—cost \$1.43 million. Not one of them wants to give that back. ‘That is part of democracy,’ they say. ‘That is critical to our work as MPs.’ I say that so is reforming our parliament. So is reforming our democratic system. So is reforming the electoral system. So is reforming campaign finance. Of course they would be required to take a principled stand if they were to support it and, again, that is contrary to their DNA. Instead they twist and turn, doing and saying anything they can to oppose the government, to oppose reform and to continue the shady, backroom deals to fund their political organisation. We in the Australian Labor Party and in the Bligh government make no apology for providing Queenslanders with a fair, honest and transparent democratic system in Queensland.

Let us look at what some of the members opposite said. Let us see what the member for Kawana said. Never in my whole life have I seen such an old fogey trying to escape from a young man's body. This is an old man desperately trying to get out of a young man's body. That is not surprising. I remember the interview he did with *Proctor*, the Queensland Law Society journal. Who were the two idols he quoted? Who were his two political idols? Sir Robert Menzies and Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen. They are the political mentors of the member for Kawana, the shadow Attorney-General, the man who seeks to be the first law officer of Queensland. There are the framed photos of ‘Ming’ and old Joh on the bedside table as he nods off at night thinking of how he can bring back the good old days.

Mr Lucas: Bring back Luke Shaw to get him off.

Mr DICK: Bring back Luke Shaw to rig juries, as the Deputy Premier says. Those were the good old days, when corruption flourished under the National Party supported by the Liberal Party. The member's contribution shows that he has a fan in his generation—trawling around state schools. This is what he said in the debate. He stated—

I can inform the House today that, when I have been attending my schools recently, all of the children have been very excited at the future prospect of a can-do real government in Queensland. They are very excited about that prospect.

Members of the parliament should not be going into schools and acting in a partisan fashion. They should never be talking in a partisan fashion to students. They should talk about our democracy.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mr DICK: I take the interjection from the member for Rockhampton. The member opposite wants to be the Attorney-General. He should not go into schools acting in such a partisan fashion. It is incumbent upon all of us to keep party politics out of schools but instead to go there and talk about civic values, civic virtue and our democracy and to promote active involvement in every political party in Queensland. That is our responsibility.

Of course, then we had the contribution of the member for Southern Downs. Of course, he trawled around that ridiculous paper in response to our *Integrity and accountability in Queensland* paper in which he questioned the very basis of the electoral system in Queensland. That is what they did last year. They issued a paper in response to the government's green paper questioning the very basis of one vote, one value. What part of the words 'one vote, one value' does the Liberal National Party not understand?

We look back to the great works of the member for Mudgeeraba. We could never forget her contribution in convening 'The Titanium Forum'. Do you remember that, Mr Deputy Speaker? To quote her website at the time, it stated, 'Gain regular access to political and business leaders'—pay the cash and get regular access to political and business leaders—'Become more closely involved with the political process' and 'Become a stakeholder in the future success of a state Liberal National government in Queensland'. Pay the price and you get in. What did she say on her website? 'These activities enable members to contribute to policy development.' Pay the price and you buy the policy. That is code for buying favours and patronage with the LNP. How much for a share in the spoils of an LNP government? For individual membership, \$1,000; business membership, \$3,000; and corporate membership, \$6,000. Now the webpage does not exist. In shame it has taken it down, but it is prepared to sell its political soul to gain power in this state.

But this debate has darker implications for democracy in Queensland. Never before has there been such a spineless group of individuals in this parliament. I do not know what the collective noun is for a set of shivers trying to find a spine to run up, but I think it is the Liberal National Party. I think that is the description. For two years it has consistently called for reform in this state—for two years. Members opposite get the opportunity to vote on it today. They represent the views of Campbell Newman and Bruce McLver. They represent the views of people outside this parliament—unelected and unaccountable—dictating to them what is happening in this place. Never before in the history of Queensland have we seen that. They get the email and they get the text, and then they are doing Campbell Newman's bidding. They wait for the phone to ring each morning and they wait for the ding on the computer when the email comes in, and then they will do whatever they can to respond and to dance to the tune played by others outside this parliament.

This is a Frankenstein of a political party that has no substance, that has no credibility, that has no principle and that has no integrity. The only thing they seek is power for power's sake. But we will stand for reform. We will stand for the modernisation of our electoral and democratic system in this place. We will not be swept away by the overblown rhetoric of Campbell Newman, who knows this is the right thing to do and, in a desperate attempt to attack it, says it is corrupt.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Kawana, you have already spoken, thank you.

Mr DICK: This is a sad hulk of what was once conservative politics in this state. Those opposite will rise to the occasion if they vote for the legislation, but they will not do that. They want to do a U-turn to the bad old days of our state. The Bligh government will not deviate from our commitment to make democracy more accountable, more open and more transparent in Queensland.

(Time expired)