




Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 30 November 2011

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS BILL

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Greenslopes—ALP) (Minister for Education and Industrial Relations) (10.28 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Civil Partnerships Bill 2011. The policy intent behind this private member's bill, introduced by the Deputy Premier, has long been Labor Party policy. I begin my comments in the debate by saying that I respect the fact that many people in Queensland hold very strong views on this issue, both in support of and in opposition to this bill. Residents of the electorate of Greenslopes, whom I am very privileged to represent in this House, also hold disparate views, so I am mindful of the fact that whichever way I vote some will agree with me and some will not.

During the course of my life, I have thought long and hard about the principles underpinning this bill. I have listened to the views of my constituents which, as members can imagine, range across a very broad spectrum of beliefs. Tonight I will vote in support of the bill.

I am proud that Labor members of the Bligh government have had the opportunity to examine their own consciences in determining whether to support this bill or not. But those members opposite, the members of the LNP in this House, will not be given the opportunity to examine their conscience and vote accordingly on this bill.

One of the most telling features of this debate, one of the fundamental differences between members of the Labor government and members of the Liberal National Party opposition, is the respect which has been shown by the Australian Labor Party and the Premier for the different views that Labor members on this side of the House might hold. As a consequence, Labor members of this parliament will exercise a conscience vote tonight. Serious questions must be asked tonight in relation to how the decision on this bill, binding on members of the LNP parliamentary party, has been determined.

In the leaders debate involving the Premier and Campbell Newman held last Friday, 25 November, Mr Newman was asked who was directing LNP policy in relation to civil unions. In response, Mr Newman said the following—

... the LNP parliamentary team that I lead as well as the candidates are the ones that made this decision. They are the ones who have decided unanimously—I will say that again, unanimously decided—that they would vote against this bill.

It is greatly disturbing that it is not just an unelected leader, who sits outside this party, Mr Newman; not just unelected Liberal National Party officials like Bruce McIver and Barry O'Sullivan; but unelected and unrepresentative candidates who hold no democratic mandate who have been involved in determining the policy of the Liberal National Party which tonight binds its parliamentary wing. Why else would Mr Newman make reference to candidates moulding policy relating to civil unions? What was said by whom to whom and when?

I know that the question of a conscience vote will be one fraught with anxiety and angst for a number of members opposite who believe in true Liberal values and for what the Liberal Party in this state once stood for. While the passage of this bill will be a joyous day for many, it is a shameful day indeed for the Liberal National Party. Today we witness traditional Liberal values being abandoned—values that I and many members of the government believe in, such as freedom of choice, respect for individuality, personal

autonomy and the rights of an individual to make a choice about their own lives. It saddens me that in this House tonight, the home of our state's democracy, consciences have stifled and voices silenced.

Today is the 176th anniversary of the birth of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known to the world as Mark Twain. He said, 'A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval.' It is a statement that is full of meaning for members of this House and for others tonight.

This is a significant bill for this parliament. It shows Queensland has matured as a society. It shows that our levels of understanding and respect have grown enormously over recent times. It shows that there is a place for everyone at the Queensland table.

I cannot help but reflect on the fact that within the past generation when laws decriminalising homosexuality were introduced into this parliament by a Labor government, when laws removing discrimination against de facto relationships including same-sex relationships were introduced in this parliament by a Labor government, when laws decriminalising altruistic surrogacy were introduced into this parliament by a Labor government the same portent of gloom and doom and decay of society was trotted out in opposition time and again. And yet, such things never came to pass.

If in our time in this parliament we are able to make life better for Queenslanders, if we can remove discrimination and prejudice against Queenslanders, if we can make laws that make Queensland more just, if we can make laws that recognise the reality of human existence in the 21st century, then it is our duty to do so. Justice, fairness, equality and love know no bounds. They are values, beliefs and ideals which motivate me and which motivate the great cause that is the Australian Labor Party. They are values which underpin this bill. I commend the bill to the House.