



Speech by


**Jarrod Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

Hansard Wednesday, 11 May 2011

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

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.51 pm), in reply: I can only describe the contribution by Labor Party members tonight as woeful at best. In this cognate debate tonight we have debated three bills. We have had the Labor Party's bill debated, the member for Beaudesert's bill debated and the LNP's bill debated. Of course, the LNP bill talked about truth in advertising. The government has said that it is not going to support our bill.

I ask members on this side of the House: why on earth would the Labor Party not support truth in advertising at elections? When I am pondering that thought things come to mind. One is a fuel tax—a fuel tax that was essentially ruled out prior to the 2009 election. When I further ponder it other things come to my mind. The sale of Queensland's assets comes to mind. If we had any form of truth in advertising in terms of what political parties were going to do—

**Mr Lucas:** That there will never, ever be a GST. That is another one—that there will never, ever be a GST.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I take that interjection from the Deputy Premier. The matter the Deputy Premier refers to then went to an election. John Howard, the Prime Minister at the time, took the GST issue to an election. He did not do it afterwards. He looked the people of Australia in the eye and said, 'We are going to have as our policy in the Liberal-National coalition a GST. If you don't like it, don't vote for us. If you support it, vote for the coalition.' What happened? There was a clear-cut policy at the election that there would be a GST introduced and Australians voted for it.

Let me explain for the Deputy Premier's understanding tonight what the fundamental difference is. I enjoy the opportunity to debate the Deputy Premier's interjection about the GST. When we talk about the sale of assets and about the abolition of the fuel tax subsidy we are talking about promises that were made prior to an election that those things would not happen. Then following the election the government turned around and did it.

In my own electorate of Kawana we have the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, which the Deputy Premier knows about all too well. There was an election commitment that 2014 would be the time for the delivery of that hospital. Two months after the election the hospital was delayed. If we put all that together, I can understand why the government members would have an issue with having truth in advertising prior to elections. They would fundamentally and systemically fail the test.

The cognate debate comprising these three bills involves debating an important fundamental legislative change. We have had members opposite say that they are standing up for democracy. We had the interesting contribution from the member for Greenslopes. The former Attorney-General came in here and said that this is all about democracy for the people. If it is such an important legislative reform agenda for the Labor Party then why have there been so few speakers from that side? If it is so important to their heartland, if it is so important to their electorates, if it is so important to democracy in Queensland, then how

is it that less than a quarter of government members could stand up in this place today and speak in support of this bill.

**Mr HOOLIHAN:** I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask you to draw the member's attention standing order 234(1). He is calling into question the motives of members of the House.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Powell): Order! Can you confine your comments to the bill at hand.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Can I seek clarification while I am on my feet. The advice that I have received is that in my summing-up in this cognate debate I can refer to all matters that have been debated today.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Yes.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Onwards and upwards we go. Let us look at the contributions of some of the members opposite. Let us look at the contribution of the member for Keppel. In talking about the truth in advertising bill, the member spoke about the need for much consideration and issues to be taken into account when we are dealing with and looking at truth in advertising. In his contribution, not necessarily in support of the bill, the member was saying that for these types of reforms around truth in advertising—and he gave us the precedents around Australia—we must give consideration and time must be spent on them. But the Labor Party in Queensland has now been in government for nearly 20 uninterrupted years. I think at least the last 12 years is probably enough time to consider the implications of a bill dealing with truth in advertising. I think it could do that. In actual fact, no, I do not think it could. I can see where the member is coming from, because I do not think the Labor Party could plan that type of bill in a 12-year period. I do take it back because it would not be long enough. Perhaps if we had not had the two-year interval in the middle then 20 years may have been enough. But 12 years was not going to cut it.

The member for Greenslopes made an interesting contribution in the cognate debate. Interestingly, he was not on the speaking list. After my contribution and that of the member for Callide I saw the member for Greenslopes trumpet into the chamber, all excited that he was on the speaking list. I can imagine that, because those opposite are worried about what is going on, they had to call in their comrade from Greenslopes to come and assist, to rally the troops and to really give it to us.

It was an interesting contribution. The member for Greenslopes said—and I have not seen *Hansard*, but I think I wrote it down correctly—that I am an old man in a young person's body trying to break through the skin. If that is the case then that is an extraordinary attack on young people. It is an extraordinary attack on young people who have a future desire to serve in this place.

Tonight we saw an extraordinary attack on young people by the member for Greenslopes. The member for Greenslopes also referred to comments that I made in my contribution when I referred to the fact that schoolchildren are looking forward to a can-do government, and no doubt the Deputy Premier will comment on that as well. When I go and speak—

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I deserve to be able to give an explanation. I was attacked by the member for Greenslopes and I am using this opportunity to answer that question of attack that was raised in this place. For anyone on the other side to consider that a member of parliament would go into a local school with the local principal's permission and advocate a vote for or against a political party is ridiculous. What I was saying in my contribution is that year 7 students are well trained in democracy in Queensland and that they know the difference between the Premier and the opposition leader, as should be the case. If you receive a couple of comments of support about something that the children have seen on the TV news, there is no issue with that.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** Can I say that just one year 7 student that I speak to would have more intelligence and competence than the collective members of the Labor Party sitting opposite tonight—just one year 7 student! In fact, I would probably put it that the year 5s that I addressed at the Pacific Lutheran College would have more intelligence. The intelligence and the know-how that those children have in terms of our democracy and our political systems in Queensland is unbelievable. I question at times whether those opposite—even those opposite who have served in this place for a long time—could debate one of the year 5 or year 7 students, and I do not believe they could. The first person I would put up against a year 5 or a year 7 student would be the member for Greenslopes, the Minister for Education.

I congratulate all members on this side of the House for their worthwhile and intelligent contributions tonight. They have raised the issues that need to be raised. Just prior to the member for Mermaid Beach's contribution tonight, he received advice from me that the government had tabled some 54 amendments to this legislation. We will no doubt deal with those amendments as the night progresses, but I think it is interesting to note that in my contribution to this cognate debate I raised the issue of the sustainability declaration—which the former infrastructure and planning minister would be well aware of—and that it was poorly drafted and that we would also see many, many amendments to this legislation. That is the attitude

of the Labor Party in Queensland: 'Just rush it through this place and don't worry about the details because we'll fix it later.' The fact is that it costs money to fix it later and that every dollar spent fixing this mess is a burden on the shoulders of the taxpayers that they should not need to wear.

In my contribution to the debate tonight I also said that this is a dog's breakfast of a bill, that it is all over the place and that there are so many uncertainties that need to be addressed. I also made the point that these uncertainties will have to start to be addressed, to which the Deputy Premier interjected, 'You don't think courts can make the interpretation.' Of course I think the courts can make the interpretation, but if we are debating the bill and these things in this place tonight then we should feel comfortable with the legislation that goes out of this place and we should feel comfortable that there will not be an open slather of interpretation through the courts. The bill should sufficiently provide advice to candidates of political parties and Independents of what is in and what is out on this issue. Less than 60 minutes after my contribution we were told that there would be 54 amendments moved in this place by the government to a bill that has not even been voted on yet. I think that is a testament to the poor drafting and to the advice that the Deputy Premier's department and potential policy advisers gave to those drafters. I repeat: we are already dealing with 54 amendments to this bill tonight. It is unbelievable that we have to deal with so many amendments before the bill is even voted on.

The member for Everton always gives a lively interpretation of the issues before the House. He said in his contribution that the LNP was leading the change with respect to the cognate debate. Well, we have to lead the change in terms of the debate and the public funding aspects of what this will cost Queenslanders, because if we do not then no-one will because the government is certainly not leading the change. The member for Everton also talked about crocodile tears and what we should spend the money on. I take personal offence at that because the member should have listened to the contributions of members in this place today as to where the money could have been spent. I made particular reference to flood victims in Grantham, cyclone victims in North Queensland and flood victims in Toowoomba. We only have to read the paper on nearly a daily basis to see that people's claims for insurance are being rejected and that their claims for funds from the Premier's flood appeal are being rejected. Those tears are not crocodile tears; they are real tears in the community.

I made the point that, when we have legislative reform that will put an extra burden on the taxpayers and cost them up to \$30 million at this stage, I believe that someone in a tent or someone who is couchsurfing and who has not got a home to go back to because of the floods could legitimately ask why the political parties are funding their campaigns and increasing the dollar amount they get for their vote at a time when people can least afford it. And it is not just that the people of Queensland can least afford it; it is that Queensland can least afford it. We are heading into a major budget deficit in a month's time. There will be major economic implications for the budget in a month's time and we are having this legislation railed through this parliament, as I said, 24 hours after the federal budget and 24 hours before one of the most corrupt former members of this place, Gordon Nuttall, appears. I could be called a cynic for asking why we are debating this today—one day after the budget and one day before Gordon Nuttall. I believe it is because members of the media are not as interested in this issue as they should be and are not taking particular note of it because they are wrapped up and involved in the budget processes and the Gordon Nuttall saga tomorrow. I firmly believe that this legislation should have gone through the committee system. I note that the member for Nicklin agreed with the point that it should have gone through the new committee system and should have been subject to rigorous debate in this place, which simply will not happen.

The member for Everton also said that we are complaining about taking public funding. I would also point out to the member for Everton that, in my contribution and the contributions of other members on this side, we made the point that public funding is with us now. The LNP supports public funding because it is in the process now. We get \$1.60 a vote roughly at the moment. The point that we are making though is that this is happening at a time when we could have spent this \$26 million to \$30 million on hospitals or schools, or perhaps we could have suspended the donation we took from a foreign government and built our own cyclone shelters with this type of money. These are the real issues that we were talking about in terms of the best interests of Queensland and in terms of public funding and the increase in public funding.

Can I address the issue that members opposite have been raising in relation to, 'If you don't like it, don't take the money.' This bill is a beast of the Labor Party that we had no input into and the Independents had no input into. So when this bill goes through the processes tonight and the parliament passes it, it will be the government's entire beast. I qualify that by saying that when you cap donations to political parties and you cap particularly the way the LNP receives donations and how much it can receive, it is ridiculous to suggest, as those opposite have suggested, 'Don't take the money.' We will be forced to accept the political donations caps. So essentially, by not having access to the money, basically our campaigns would be null and void. We would not have any money to run them. If the government stood in this place and said, 'We withdraw the bill from the House and we are returning everything back to normal,' then we would not be having this debate and this issue would not arise. I say to the Deputy Premier that, when members of his party criticise us because we can simply not take the money, get rid of the caps on the donations and

then it is a different story. But when you are dealing with caps on donations, in reality you have to look at the public funding rationale behind this bill. As I said, it is forced on us. This bill will go through this place, as all the crossbench members have mentioned tonight. The legislation will be with us from hence forward.

The Electoral (Truth in Advertising) Amendment Bill addresses an element that is crucial to any election campaign and that is political advertising. The bill is aimed particularly at candidates and political parties that have a do whatever it takes approach to achieve public office in Queensland. Generally, what we have seen on display in this debate really epitomises the modern Queensland Labor Party. I am often told that what politicians do—and I think I reflected on this in my contribution—that destroys the fabric of our democratic system is to either make promises that they never deliver or make promises before an election and then do the opposite straight after. Those are essential elements of the modern-day Queensland Labor Party. In Australia and in Queensland, voters have seen two cases of this occurring. Just days before the 2010 federal election, the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, trumpeted the words—

There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.

Yet just months later, after being elected to minority government, the federal Labor government is in the process of enacting this carbon tax on the people of Australia. As we have seen in this place this week, the Queensland Labor Party will not stick up for small businesses in Queensland upon which the carbon tax will have a detrimental impact. In Queensland the Treasurer made the commitment that if the Bligh government was re-elected the fuel subsidy would be restored. Just three months after the June budget of 2009, the fuel subsidy was ripped out. That added an extra 8.6c a litre to the cost of petrol for motorists in Queensland.

So when we are looking at truth in advertising, when we are looking at truth in politics, the government on one side of the political fence went to an election saying, 'The assets are safe; we are not going to get rid of the fuel subsidy; we are going to build the Sunshine Coast University Hospital,' and then within a short period after the election it changed the goalposts. You cannot tell me that it was all of a sudden and that the global financial crisis hit in a period of one month, because it did not; it happened over a long period.

When we look at truth in advertising, I recall at the last federal election the Labor Party candidate for the electorate of Fisher was a former member of this place, Chris Cummins. Incidentally, he has been a member of this place, he has tried to get into federal parliament and he has also tried to get into council. He was successful in getting a seat on the council and he tried to get back into council after he left this place. At the time he distributed a brochure to residents titled 'Say no way to LNP hospital delay' which claimed that the Sunshine Coast LNP had continually delayed the building of the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. The flyer stated that any relocation would delay a new \$2 billion hospital for up to five years. No mention was made that it was the Labor Party state government that delayed the much needed Sunshine Coast University Public Hospital by two years. I am not sure if that line of argument speaks more of the intelligence of the candidate, Chris Cummins, or of the level of political tactic that we have come to in this state. It is that kind of blatant distortion of the truth that people are fed up with. That line of argument probably has more to do with the intelligence, or none thereof, of the person who distributed the flyer. But it was a blatant disregard for the facts in that, of course, the LNP did not delay the hospital, because it was not in government and did not have the power to delay the hospital.

The bill that we introduced—the Electoral (Truth in Advertising) Amendment Bill—gave the power to the Electoral Commission to direct an advertiser of misleading or false information to withdraw the publication or publish a retraction. The forms of publication that were debated today cover advertising on the internet as well as advertising through the traditional print, radio and television media. There are penalties in place of up to \$10,000 for any person who authorises, causes or permits the publication of an electoral advertisement that contains a statement purporting to be a fact that is inaccurate and misleading to a material extent.

It is important that when Queenslanders view, read or listen to political advertising that the statements that are being reported are, in fact, truthful. Honesty and integrity in our political system needs to be a priority for all members of parliament regardless of their political colours. The bill presented by the member for Beaudesert included amendments that would institute compulsory preferential voting and a voluntary voting system. It would also prohibit the distribution of how-to-vote cards and prohibit the display of political material on land occupied by the state. The bill also contained provisions that required identification to be sighted by an issuing officer in order to obtain a ballot paper. In my view, that was the only worthwhile provision in his entire bill. To some extent it had some merit.

Can I say in relation to the bill presented by the member for Beaudesert—because he had much to say in relation to my contribution to the debate of the opposition's bill—it is wishful thinking completely. It really goes to the heart of how this member now shamefully represents the people of Beaudesert who, in good faith, voted for him as a Liberal National Party candidate. At the ballot box people voted according to his how-to-vote card, which was a Liberal National Party how-to-vote card, and then elected him to this place as a Liberal National Party member of parliament. So it really is the height of hypocrisy that a

member who became an Independent and who has now set up his own Queensland Party can stand in this place and advocate for the Westminster system, loyalty and so forth when he was elected as a Liberal National Party candidate.

**Mr McLINDON:** I rise to a point of order. The Westminster system does not even mention political parties. I take offence to that. If the member understood the Westminster system he would not have made that comment and I take offence to it. I ask him to withdraw. If he understood the Westminster system—

**Mr BLEIJIE:** I withdraw. I was going to leave the member for Beaudesert, but he has encouraged me to continue with his representations in this place. I repeat: the member for Beaudesert was elected with a how-to-vote card as a Liberal National Party candidate.

**Mr Lucas:** Oh, you're responsible!

**Mr BLEIJIE:** You can have him if you want. The member's bill wants to cancel how-to-vote cards, yet some 2½ years ago he had his how-to-vote cards and electoral material plastered on state owned land, plastered all over the place by volunteers, friends and members of the Liberal National Party, saying, 'Vote for me. I am a member of the Liberal-National team.'

He sat in this place for a period of time as an Independent, advocating that the Independents are the only ones who can do anything. Then he set up his own completely separate political party. For this member and the bill he has introduced it is all about the moment—the political opportunity. He is telling people what he thinks they really want to hear but has no plans to deliver. It does remind me of the old days of One Nation. Essentially that is what they did. They would go out spruiking this, spruiking that, telling people what they wanted to hear. We have seen it all again today with the member for Beaudesert's bill.

He espouses the upholding of the Westminster tradition. Tonight he espoused that tradition in his contribution, but I recall him having to be called into line for something that was quite anti Westminster tradition and which I will not repeat because I understand that we do not discuss those particular issues in this great chamber because that would be anti Westminster tradition. It really says something about the member for Beaudesert that he talked about the member for Hinchinbrook and me but then had to be pulled into line for his own comments.

I dispute the premise that the member states in relation to compulsory preferential voting. One minute the member for Beaudesert is saying in his bill that he wants compulsory preferential voting on the ballot paper but the next he is saying that people should not have to compulsorily vote. One minute he stands up and believes in people compulsorily filling out a form but the next he does not believe in the compulsory aspect of going to vote. It just does not make sense.

The distribution of how-to-vote cards at polling booths is a final offering of information and assistance to many voters in the state who decide their preferred representative either on polling day or when walking into a booth. It does not contain detailed policy explanations. It does not contain all the elements of political brochures that one would expect to be distributed during the campaign. It is simply a voting pattern that a candidate wants their supporters to follow.

Today we have debated and tonight we will move some amendments that will really test the integrity of the Labor Party. It will test everything its members have said in this place today. It will test their comments in relation to upholding democracy. It will test their integrity in terms of a real legislative reform agenda and it will be an integrity test on the balance of fairness in our state electoral system.