




Speech by

Dr Chris Davis

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

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CRIMINAL LAW (FALSE EVIDENCE BEFORE PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr DAVIS** (Stafford—LNP) (7.43 pm): I rise in support of the Criminal Law (False Evidence Before Parliament) Amendment Bill 2012. It is indeed a sad reflection on Labor that it is even necessary to have this matter before the House, but it was here on 9 December 2005 that the Beattie-Bligh Labor government yet again dispensed with integrity and accountability—one of their many actions that will long haunt and disadvantage Queenslanders. The LNP is working hard to reverse the disasters of some 20 years of Labor, and this legislation is part of that agenda.

As the honourable member for Condamine reminded us earlier this evening, the events of 9 December 2005 began in July 2005 when at a public hearing of a Queensland parliamentary estimates committee the then health minister, the Hon. Gordon Nuttall MP, was questioned by the shadow health minister regarding his knowledge of problems surrounding proficiencies of overseas trained doctors. The then minister denied having been briefed on this issue. An accompanying senior departmental officer advised the committee that the minister had indeed been briefed.

The then opposition asked the Crime and Misconduct Commission to assess whether the minister had given a knowingly false answer to the question. The commission reported back in December 2005 recommending options that did not preclude possible prosecution under section 57 of the Criminal Code. The then Premier recalled parliament in which Nuttall's Labor cronies passed a motion that removed that option. Indeed, Labor sprung to his defence, calling him a decent and honest man. Why would you pass a motion to deny a decent and honest man an opportunity to clear his name?

The reality was that scores of Queenslanders had died or been maimed by the tragedy at Bundaberg Base Hospital and the health minister had apparently lied in relation to being briefed about this. The response by Premier Beattie on 9 December 2005 effectively determined that such serious and consequential dishonesty could not be considered as a possible criminal matter and all that was needed was for the minister to claim that he misunderstand the question, apologise and resign when, in fact, he was left with no option but to do so.

To quote the member for Callide and now Deputy Premier, on 9 December 2005 he told the House—

This is a clear-cut case of whitewashing a Labor mate. It is a clear-cut case of providing an out for a Labor mate who has been caught out doing what this government does so well, and that is hide the truth. It seeks to hide the truth and that has become part of the entrenched culture of the Beattie Labor government—to hide the truth, to distort the truth, to mislead this parliament, to mislead the people of Queensland at every opportunity. The only difference is that the former minister for health got caught out. He got caught out because his public servants were prepared to put their hands up and say that the evidence the minister gave was wrong.

The Labor Party continues that culture of hiding the truth to this day. As we heard recently, it will not disclose critical matters in relation to its disastrous Health payroll system, the cost of which is contributing to the state's devastating deficit and debt and the enormous human cost that is exacting.

Another disastrous breach of integrity has been in the area of children's health services. Despite repeated requests, they have never disclosed a proper basis for relocating the Royal Children's Hospital from the world-class Herston site to former Premier Bligh's electorate. I was in Victoria recently and, amongst other activities, attended a presentation on private-public partnerships. The new Melbourne Royal Children's Hospital is an award-winning product of a PPP. I asked whether Queensland might have benefited from a similar strategy in considering how best to advance children's health services in Queensland. The answer I received, to my recollection, was that that would not have been possible in Queensland in the Beattie-Bligh era because there would have been an expectation of deals, such as contracts being let to Labor mates, which of course undermines the whole purpose of a PPP, which is getting the best value in the public interest. Integrity and accountability were seemingly gladly given away to ensure that Labor served its mates and not the people of Queensland.

This government has literally been railroaded into being party to the shonky process from a deeply dishonest Labor government which aims to close the Brisbane Royal Children's Hospital. This risks children's and women's health services, especially on the north side of Brisbane, including my electorate of Stafford. It is also a sizeable part of the massive debt that is forcing this LNP government to make some tough decisions that no-one welcomes—all rooted in the dishonesty and incompetence of Labor and its mates.

The message from this integrity and accountability legislation before us now is also vital for other important reasons. One need only look at current political commentary to see that breach of trust is probably the issue that most angers and disengages voters. I would suggest that we should be honest not just to avoid negative reactions but because it is the right thing to do.

As a medical practitioner, the one thing that I had instilled in me was the concept of a duty of care—the obligation to act diligently, competently and with integrity in providing healthcare services. Politicians have similar obligations—to act diligently, competently and with integrity in serving their electorates and in their work in the Legislative Assembly and its committees. Literally, we have a duty to clarify the nature of the questions put to us and a responsibility to check our facts and acknowledge significant uncertainty or probability of error in material matters.

A final point, and probably the most important, is that of leadership. We teach our children to be honest. Why? Because it underpins the trust that is one of the most unifying and essential forces in a decent and progressive society. Politicians, as the representatives of the people, should be bastions of integrity and good moral judgement. Where that is not the case, it provides a lamentable excuse for the crooks and thugs in this world to hold up politicians as their role models.

This legislation sends a message that we take our obligations to act with integrity and accountability seriously. Hopefully, it will never be necessary to refer anyone for deliberately providing false evidence to the House or its committees, but it will be reassuring to have this legislation back in place. I accordingly commend this bill and the amendments proposed by the Attorney-General to the House.