



Speech by

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CRIMINAL LAW (FALSE EVIDENCE BEFORE PARLIAMENT) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WATTS (Toowoomba North—LNP) (7.51 pm): I rise to support the Criminal Law (False Evidence Before Parliament) Amendment Bill 2012. I concur with my colleague who asked earlier why we need to be here discussing this piece of legislation. It stood for 107 years and it was never needed in this place because people acted with honour, they told the truth and they answered questions openly and honestly. But then somebody did falter and we lost that measure of credibility that this place deserves and that all parliamentarians deserve. So what did this place do? Under the Labor leadership, what then happened should be a shame on Labor forever.

Peter Beattie thought he was smarter than the drafter of the Criminal Code—and this really shows the humility of the man!—and he came into this place and defended his mate, and he did that by changing the legislation so that he could not be held accountable for misleading and lying to the people whilst answering questions about a most serious matter, and that matter concerned people's lives being put gravely at risk. We all know the debacle that followed within the health system with that lie being continued and covered up. We also all know the outcome of Gordon Nuttall. On that night when this bill was proposed and passed, many members spoke. The then member for Mulgrave spoke on that night, and I will quote from his speech. He said—

We have heard a lot in this place today about process, precedent and propriety surrounding the actions of the member for Sandgate. I want to speak about the person—the person whom I have known for much of my adult life. I stand here today and attest to the good character of the member for Sandgate, a character which those opposite have sought to tarnish for their own crude political ends over a period of months in this chamber.

I have always respected the integrity of the member for Sandgate, Gordon Nuttall. I hold that view now, and I will continue to hold that view into the future. My respect for him is not diminished in any way by recent events. It is validated by his actions yesterday and here again today.

Those are fairly condemning words based on what happened next, and we all know the history of what happened next. I think it shows that, even if you know somebody for a long period of their life, this place should have rules, procedures and regulations to hold that person to account and that those rules should be able to be enforced and there should be severe punishment. The fact that they had not been used for such a long period of time shows the integrity of the people who have entered this place, but when someone falters they deserve to be punished and they should be punished under the Criminal Code and I think it should hold the penalty that has been put forward.

I am very pleased to support this bill. The bill delivers on our pre-election commitments by inserting into the Criminal Code the repealed section 57, as has been mentioned by many of my colleagues here tonight. It will now make it an offence to knowingly give false evidence to parliament or its committees. I think it is very important that we talk about the committees. We have in this parliament a committee structure that is working very well. There are lots of opportunities for people to come and speak to the committees and provide evidence, and I think it is very important that everybody knows that if they lie in that committee inquiry they can be held accountable under the Criminal Code. I am very pleased this is here.

The bill amends the Criminal Code and it will introduce the repealed section 57, as I said before. There have been some minor changes to the language to reflect the modern drafting practices that we see in legislation today. A couple of questions were raised through the committee process, and I understand the Attorney-General has taken those on board and we appreciate his comments on that.

There has been a reasonable amount of discussion around parliamentary privilege, and I think that is an important term. It is a privilege to represent the people of Queensland in this place. It is a privilege to have the responsibility of running the great state of Queensland placed upon your shoulders. I certainly do not think this parliament should allow its ministers to lie to parliament when they are asked a direct question. Whilst I understand some of the positions that have been put forward and that it might jeopardise this, I do not believe it will at all. Again, I go back to the fact that it had not been used for 107 years.

I think the Queensland community expects our parliamentarians to act honestly and responsibly and with the highest integrity. When Labor was in government, the thing that was missing in this place was integrity. We know that happened on many occasions. The people of Queensland saw through the modern spin and the modern marketing of the brand Labor, and eventually they realised that they have been lied to, they had been deceived and they had been misled and that a massive debt had been rung up in their name.

The Queensland community expects us to have a strong piece of legislation such as this to be able to protect the House and protect us and ensure that when people speak they speak the truth. Allowing courts to deal with such conduct guards against the suspicion of political interference and cronyism. This interference and cronyism has been demonstrated in Queensland, especially in most recent times with Gordon Nuttall. Being able to send someone who has intentionally misled this place off to be judged and have the veracity of their evidence tested in a judicial manner with full procedural fairness is something that the people of Queensland deserve. Someone who has an accusation like that made against them also deserves the opportunity to be able to defend themselves with that full procedural fairness. I have no problem at all with suggestions that this interferes with parliamentary privilege, and I have no problem at all with the judiciary being able to hold someone accountable if they have intentionally lied to and misled this House.

I do not want to speak for a long time on this bill. I think the bill itself is fairly simple. People expect that we will tell them the truth. They expect that when the government speaks they will be told the truth. Ultimately, the people will get to judge a government that does not speak the truth. In the meantime, this place is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the people of Queensland are well served, and they will not be well served if we endorse lying in parliament, misleading parliament and actively trying to deceive people whilst they are trying to administer Queensland. I commend the Attorney-General for bringing this on. I think it was a great thing to take to the election. Certainly, as I was out doorknocking and doing my roadsides, I learnt that many people were sick and tired of being lied to.

They know that they were lied to about the fuel subsidy. They know that they were lied to about the asset sales and they wanted to hold somebody accountable, and they did that on 24 March. I think if someone comes into this place and intentionally lies or misleads or if somebody comes to one of our committees and lies or misleads, they should be held accountable to the full extent of the law as was drafted in the Criminal Code in 1899. I fully support this bill. I commend it to the House.