




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR INALA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Political Parties, Donations; O'Sullivan, Mr B

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.01 am): At the 2012 state election the Premier promised to make his government more open and accountable than any of its predecessors. Like a string of other promises, that one has clearly been broken. But worse, when it comes to political fundraising it is fair to say the promise of openness and accountability has been smashed, not just broken. The LNP never promised Queenslanders before the election that it would actively water down the former Labor government's tough rules on political donations. It has flagged changes to raise the threshold for reporting donations so that anything less than \$12,400 will go unreported. It wants to scrap the \$5,000 and \$2,000 caps Labor put in place for donations to parties and candidates. The Newman government wants less scrutiny, not more, when it comes to political fundraising; less transparency, not more; less accountability. It is this failure of the LNP that I wish to focus on today.

We all remember that the Attorney-General had an argument at the 2012 estimates hearing with the former chair of the Crime and Misconduct Commission on the issue of political donations and fundraising. The last thing that this government wants is the state's anticorruption watchdog sniffing around LNP donations. This government does not want the CMC examining the LNP's pay-per-view activities. It does not want scrutiny of the \$11,000 charge for its regional round tables which give access to ministers. It does not want scrutiny of its QForum fundraising events. It does not want scrutiny of its use of taxpayer resources such as the health blueprint developed by Queensland Health but used as the centrepiece of an LNP fundraising lunch.

Today I can outline to the House yet another instance of why this government is so keen to block scrutiny of donations and fundraising. The opposition has been informed about a series of shabby events that prove why we need to maintain strong Labor values and not weak LNP values. We have been told of a matter that shows just how untrustworthy the LNP is when it comes to fundraising, campaign expenses and the public funding that goes with it.

What we know is that one LNP member tried to milk taxpayers out of \$2,200 to which the member was not entitled. I have been advised that after the 2012 state election this member lodged a return with the Electoral Commission of Queensland showing that \$2,200 had been spent by their campaign on telephone polling. This is an expense that, under current rules, can be claimed back by a member as a publicly funded expense. The member in question did just that and claimed back \$2,200 from taxpayers which was supposedly for telephone polling expenses. The opposition has been told that the \$2,200 was never spent on telephone polling, but it was actually payment of a commission for fundraising. Such a commission payment is legitimate. Anyone who raises substantial funds, as was done for this member, is entitled to be paid for their efforts.

In this case, I understand well over \$50,000 was raised for the member's 2012 local electorate campaign. It is perfectly acceptable for a fundraiser to lodge an invoice for commission with the

member provided that it is paid from the member's campaign funds. It is not acceptable for a member to misrepresent that expense—to which they were never entitled—for the sole purpose of clawing \$2,200 out of the public purse. The opposition has been advised that an invoice clearly marked as being commission of \$2,200 for fundraising was sent to the member, but a written instruction was given to the fundraiser by the member's electorate office that the invoice must be changed. The new invoice was not to mention commission, but it was to be for phone polling. The invoice was paid, and some months later the member claimed back \$2,200 from the ECQ; in other words, from taxpayers. If the member tries to argue now that it was some sort of mistake, why did she not question it then?

If that is not bad enough, the sordid saga gets worse. The opposition has been told that early this year the LNP heard about what had happened. The party set up its own internal inquiry to investigate the matter. It found that the member in question, the member for Mudgeeraba, had indeed knowingly put in a dodgy claim to the ECQ. It found that the member deliberately changed the invoice from 'commission' to 'telephone polling' in order to claim \$2,200 back from taxpayers. In other words, it was a dodgy and fraudulent claim which was deliberately lodged by the member for her own benefit.

But what did the internal LNP inquiry recommend? I am told it ran for 12 weeks but did not even speak to all concerned and it did not follow up with a key witness; in other words, it soft-pedaled and covered up. It told the member to withdraw the claim, repay the \$2,200 and forget all about it. That is exactly what the ECQ records show the member did.

This is what we know: an LNP member makes a dodgy claim for \$2,200 in taxpayer funds, the LNP sets up its own inquiry and finds deliberate wrongdoing in connection with those taxpayer funds, but those on the LNP inquiry panel then choose to sweep it under the carpet. As was reported in the *Australian* last month, the ECQ thought that this was so serious that the matter should be sent to the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

I still want answers. What exactly did the Premier or any of his senior ministers know about this dodgy claim and the LNP's dodgy inquiry? What did they know and when were they told? Do they support the actions of their own member? Will any action be taken against this member or, as internal LNP mutterings suggest, will the Premier leave it until preselection time for others to clean up? Will he sit on his hands just as he did with the member for Redcliffe? Will he again fail to show a shred of leadership? Will he continue to accept the vote of this member? Does the Premier believe that the member has acted in accordance with the higher standards he promised Queenslanders at the last election?

In addition, does the Premier have confidence in those in the LNP who conducted the 12-week inquiry, one of whom, I am advised, was Gold Coast based LNP official Bernard Ponting? Does the Premier believe that the other person who conducted the LNP inquiry, LNP heavyweight Barry O'Sullivan, acted properly? Does the Premier believe that he is a fit and proper person after being involved in the alleged cover-up of a dodgy claim for taxpayer funds? These are important questions about the person, and we demand answers from the Premier. Barry O'Sullivan is the Premier's nominee for the current Senate vacancy. Is the Premier going to persist with this nominee? Queenslanders deserve to have all of their representatives sitting in the Senate when it resumes. It is well past the time this Premier found someone else—

Madam SPEAKER: Order, member! I will advise the House that we are not pre-empting debate on other motions before the House.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Thank you.