




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR INALA

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MOTION: DRISCOLL, MR SN, FINDING OF CONTEMPT AND FINE

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.37 am): I rise to support the motion that has been moved by the Leader of the House this morning at this historic sitting of the Queensland parliament. From the outset I, too, join with the Premier in thanking the chair of the Ethics Committee as well as all of the members who have served on that committee. As the Premier indicated, it was a long process. Having been a former chair of the Ethics Committee, I know that members of the committee never take these issues lightly. They are very serious issues and being a member of that committee places extra responsibility on them.

What a sad, sorry state of affairs this parliament finds itself forced to deal with today. What a sad, sorry, avoidable state of affairs the government finds itself in because it refused to act on one of its own members long after cracks appeared in his facade, long after extremely serious allegations had been levelled at that MP not only in this place but also in both the media and the public arena. Now it has come to this. It has come to a regrettable, avoidable moment when this proud Queensland institution is compelled to deal with the LNP's shame. That is the place we are at today, where we are compelled to call a former member before the bar of this parliament to explain himself. It saddens me very deeply personally to see this sacred place forced to deal with such a sad, sorry mess.

I rise to contribute to the debate on this motion because, as I said previously, this is an historic day. It is one of the few times in its history that, after consideration of Ethics Committee report No. 139, this House has been asked to consider the question of whether a member should have to appear at the bar of this House to provide an explanation in relation to very, very serious allegations. This matter is deserving of the utmost seriousness. It requires that from each and every member of this place. No-one in this place should consider this matter lightly. We must treat it with grim and sober determination because of the very nature of the matter that we are considering and because of the astonishing, shocking allegations that are at its core. It requires serious consideration.

Let us consider the facts. The former LNP member for Redcliffe has been found by the Ethics Committee to have committed a number of contempts of the parliament. It found that on 48 separate occasions the member committed the contempt of failing to declare an interest in the Register of Members' Interests and Register of Related Persons' Interests. The committee has recommended that an appropriate penalty for each of these breaches would be: in respect of two instances where the member corrected the register before being referred to the registrar, there should be no fine imposed; in respect of four instances of failing to register a spouse's interest in the register of related persons, there should be a fine of \$1,000 imposed for each instance; in respect of 42 instances of failing to declare an interest, the committee determined to impose the maximum penalty of \$2,000 on each count.

But these involve far more than merely failing to declare an interest, because those failures relate to receipt of funds from community organisations receiving funding from taxpayers and income to the Driscoll family company Norsefire. For example, the investigation undertaken by the committee

disclosed that the Regional Community Association Moreton Bay made payments totalling \$151,331.44 to Norsefire, the Driscoll family company. The Queensland Retail Traders and Shopkeepers Association made payments totalling \$139,434 to Norsefire. Norsefire paid \$215,670.02 to Mr and Mrs Driscoll's joint bank account. In addition, Mrs Driscoll was employed by the community organisation as a part-time administration officer between September 2012 and February 2013. For that six-month period as a part-time administration officer she received payments totalling \$15,831.23. In total there were 37 payments found that should have been disclosed totalling \$522,266.68.

This figure is absolutely astonishing. More than half a million dollars is involved in these transactions, which are a complex web of financial arrangements. What is particularly appalling, what is particularly sad, and what is particularly confronting is that these large sums of money paid to the Driscolls and their family company were from an organisation that provides help to Redcliffe's most vulnerable and most disadvantaged—people who are on the down side of advantage. I would like to quote from the Regional Community Associate Moreton Bay's website so that everyone in this place, particularly the Premier and each of the former colleagues of the former member for Redcliffe, knows what this organisation does with this money provided by government and from donations. It states—

RCAMB is a non-profit organisation and relies heavily on government funding, charitable donations and the help of volunteer staff. Our ultimate aim is to provide the maximum possible benefit to those members of the community who are experiencing a range of life's difficulties.

I would like to specifically list the services RCAMB provides with this money so that again no-one in this place can be in any doubt about the nature of this organisation, which has been so devastated by events outlined by the committee's reports.

With government funding and from donations RCAMB provides basic food, financial assistance and advice to those Redcliffe residents experiencing financial crisis. With government funding and from donations the community organisation provides counselling and assistance for victims of domestic violence. It uses government funding and donations to provide counselling and support for those facing mental illness. With this money it organises activities and transportation for older people who would otherwise rarely leave their homes. It uses this funding for a child contact centre—a facility that gives parents who are experiencing custodial issues a safe, pleasant and supervised environment.

It fills me with great personal sadness, as it should with all of us, to think of those families who cannot put food on their table, the parents who cannot access their children, and the mentally ill who cannot receive counselling—all because the Driscolls and their company were receiving half a million dollars. I recall travelling to Redcliffe at Easter to meet with the staff and volunteers at RCAMB who had been told their jobs had been terminated, who had not received their pay and who had been told that there was no money to pay them their wages. I recall how they were surprised to hear a statement on that day in this place by communities minister Tracy Davis that her department was working hard with the community organisation. It was news to them, because no-one from the LNP government had bothered to visit them despite the widely publicised problems at the centre, and they had not been able to tell employees whether they would be. No-one from the LNP government, let alone the responsible minister, had visited to inspect documents or speak to staff and volunteers in the week since it became apparent that there were serious problems at the organisation. These members of the community organisation were in tears as they spoke to me about their concerns for the future of essential services for clients with mental health problems, the homeless and victims of domestic violence, for families who were facing some crisis and were having trouble providing the essentials for their children.

I listened with great interest to what Mr Driscoll's solicitor had to say. In a part of his statement he said very clearly in a question posed to members of this House: where is the public harm in the nondisclosure of the interest? Let me make it very clear that the public harm was to the community organisation that provides the essential services to the people of Redcliffe; that was the public harm. So for the solicitor, on behalf of Mr Driscoll, to pose that question to members—I refute that allegation completely. There was public harm to the people of Redcliffe who sadly missed out.

Of course we know who was to blame for this. The Ethics Committee report leaves no doubt about that: the former LNP star candidate and MP Scott Driscoll is to blame. He let the community down. He has betrayed each of those Redcliffe residents who had been looked after by the community organisation. He has betrayed each and every person who calls Redcliffe home. But the blame should not stop with Scott Driscoll. I blame the Premier for picking this man as the member for Redcliffe. I blame the Premier for maintaining full confidence in this man even when it was abundantly

clear that something was very, very wrong. I blame the Premier for standing by this man despite the mounting evidence. I blame the Premier for this disgraceful episode, for creating this mess and then cynically attempting to emerge from it with clean hands. It saddens me to think that this wonderful institution that is the Queensland Parliament has been brought into such disrepute by the candidate who was endorsed by the LNP—and before it the National Party—for three previous state elections.

I recall Bruce McIver saying that the member for Redcliffe had misled the LNP's selection committee over the preselection. Why did the leadership team stand by this man for so long? The contempts relating to the registers of interests were not the end of it. On 19 March 2013 I wrote to the registrar of the Register of Members' Interests to complain about the noncompliance issues. On that same date the then member for Redcliffe rose in this House and defended himself, saying that he had 'ceased being a voluntary president of the QRTSA in September last year'. This was contrary to evidence that was presented to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission on 30 May 2013.

Mrs Driscoll presented minutes and resolutions from a meeting that purportedly replaced Mr Driscoll with Mrs Driscoll as president of the organisation on 1 September 2012. However, the two other alleged attendees at that meeting—other than Mr and Mrs Driscoll—both gave evidence on oath that they did not attend the meeting. Consequently, the QIRC found that the purported minutes and resolutions of the committee were a sham and that the meeting did not actually take place. So the deputy president of the QIRC, Mr Adrian Bloomfield, wrote to the Speaker alleging that in making his statement on 19 March 2013 the then member for Redcliffe had intentionally misled the House. The committee found this to be the case and recommended that the maximum fine of \$2,000 be imposed on the member.

We are now called on to consider the recommendations of the Ethics Committee. That brings us to today. It brings us to this extremely sobering moment in the history of this parliament. It is rare that this House is called upon to judge one of its own members for such a serious range of breaches of the privileges of this House. This is the worst example that has been perpetrated in this House and it grieves me enormously.

The amount of money involved is far greater than any person in this House could possibly have imagined, but what makes this conduct even more severe is that it is against some of the most vulnerable people in our society—exactly the people to whom a member of this House owes a special duty to protect. This parliament has published a number of fact sheets which outline various aspects of the roles and responsibilities of different officers of the parliament. Fact sheet 3.17 relates to the role of a member of parliament. It explains the role of a member in relation to their constituents. The first of these is 'giving assistance and advice to those in difficulty'. Failure on this front alone means that the former member for Redcliffe is not fit to grace this House.

The committee looked at the entirety of the conduct of the member for Redcliffe. The whole of the conduct of the former member for Redcliffe is much more than the sum of its parts. What the committee referred to as the cumulative effect of the findings of contempt means that the committee found that Mr Driscoll has engaged in conduct unworthy of a member of the Legislative Assembly and, in doing so, has brought odium on the Legislative Assembly as an institution. He is deserving of the ultimate penalty of this House. More than this, those who put him here should hang their heads in shame. The photograph of the Premier and the Deputy Premier embracing their chosen one for the people of Redcliffe will continue to haunt the LNP.

I also recall that the solicitor for Mr Driscoll today once again raised the issue that—

A government member interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Excuse me, member. He raised the issue that perhaps Mr Driscoll should be treated differently from a minister of the Crown, as was the case with Mr Gordon Nuttall. On this matter I can agree with the Premier: it does not matter if you are a backbencher in this House, whether you are the Leader of the House or whether you are a minister; the same onus of responsibility is placed on every member of this House. There is no distinction between elected members of the House.

I note that the former member for Redcliffe resigned before the events that have taken place today. As the Premier and the Leader of the House have said, these are very serious allegations and the former member has been found guilty of contempt. The matter of the fines to be imposed by this House has not been taken lightly by the Ethics Committee. This is a very serious matter for the House.

In the future, the people of Redcliffe need to represent them someone they can be proud of, someone they can go to as a champion for their local community, someone who will represent their interests—not like the former LNP member Scott Driscoll, who fleeced the community organisation, who put at risk those people who needed help the most: people facing mental health issues, people experiencing domestic violence and people who struggle around Christmas time to put food on the table. Mr Scott Driscoll represented those people here in this parliament, and that is absolutely shameful and disgraceful.

The opposition had been asking numerous questions of ministers in relation to the conduct of the then member for Redcliffe. Those ministers refused at times to answer those questions. When we asked about the audits that were being conducted allegedly by the health department and the communities department there was almost a wall of silence. It took the courage of journalists from the *Courier-Mail* to go out and pursue these issues. They pursued these issues until the government was forced to act. The government did not act independently in relation to these issues; it was forced to act in the public interest because the issues were mounting and mounting.

Yesterday I was at Redcliffe and actually met with members of this former community organisation. They were relieved to know that their member had resigned, but they were shocked, horrified and absolutely appalled about the amount of money that was fleeced from their community organisation—an organisation they had built up over the years. Some of these members had been involved in that organisation for over 20 years. They know how people at Redcliffe feel. They know the daily struggles people face to put food on the table. The former member fleeced that organisation. He was not taking money from some big business organisation; he was taking money from a community organisation—

Mr Stevens: You don't get much bigger than Woolies.

Ms PALASZCZUK: That, too, Leader of the House. The community organisation sought to support the most vulnerable in his community. Not only that, he was their elected representative. It is absolutely shameful and disgraceful. The people who missed out were the people of Redcliffe. At the by-election the people of Redcliffe will have their chance to vote on what they think of the LNP's former member, Scott Driscoll.

(Time expired)