




Speech By
Hon. Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

MOTION: QUEENSLAND HEALTH, PAYROLL SYSTEM

 **Hon. TJ NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Treasurer and Minister for Trade) (4.10 pm): The test today is a test of the opposition leader's commitment. It is a test of her commitment to follow through on the words that she pronounced in this House in November last year, and they are—

Openness and transparency in government decision making is of paramount importance.

Today, the opposition leader and her team have the opportunity to either pass the test or fail the test. It is simply put that way. They can release their documents, they can release their diaries, they can release their lobbyists register and they can pass the test. Or they can vote against this motion and they will fail the test. The test is about their openness and accountability when they were in government—not now that they are in opposition; when they were in government. It is a test that they have failed so far.

I go back to the history of the failed introduction of the Health payroll system. It has been described a number of times as the biggest single failure of public administration in Queensland—I think my friend the Minister for Health said possibly since the Collins class submarines, another Labor failure of public administration. When the failures first started occurring, I recall what the Labor Party said. It said there was no problem. It said, 'It's all going to be fixed up. It's only a teething problem at the beginning of it.' Then when it got worse and we found that people were not being paid, were being overpaid, or did not know where their pay was, there was going to be a report. If I recall, PWC was going to do the original report. The Labor Party still was not open and accountable, because I had to write to the Auditor-General to request that the Auditor-General carry out an investigation into the botched and failed introduction of the Health payroll system.

There are a lot of questions that remain unanswered in relation to the political leadership, if you like, at the time. Those questions can be answered either in the positive or the negative by the Leader of the Opposition simply agreeing to release the documents—the diary and the register of lobbyists interests. We often hear the Leader of the Opposition come into this place and lambaste us, ask us questions and, in fact, ask questions on the basis of documents that we have already released. We release far more than they ever released in government.

So what has the opposition leader got to fear from releasing those documents? Why is she holding on to the documents that we release monthly? We put them up on the web every month. They have full access to the meetings that I hold, the meetings that the education minister has. I have even heard the Leader of the Opposition in comments on my own diaries being released saying, 'He seems to work quite hard. He's doing a good job.' Who knows? Maybe we will be able to say the same thing about the opposition leader. I do not know, but we will have a look and we will see. So it is a test that the opposition leader has so far indicated that she is not willing to put herself to. It is a test that she seems to be reluctant to undertake.

We know that a record of attendance of Labor ministers at fundraisers and other events is now not publicly available and introductions by lobbyists and others is not publicly available. We do know that they meet with them. They have a history here of an article in the *Australian Financial Review* in September titled, 'Bligh defends staff links to lobbyists group'. We have an invitation to an evening with Premier Anna Bligh to help raise funds for Murray Watt's re-election. We have the *Australian* article titled 'Rudd keeps Labor Party donor names from public'. Then we have another article titled 'Bligh deputy ordered to meet party donors'.

When it comes to being open and accountable and to releasing documents, the Labor Party says one thing and, as always, does another. In the whole litany of the disaster of the Health payroll system, there has been a failure on the part of any member of the Labor government to fully accept responsibility for what has been singularly the largest failure in public administration in Queensland's history. They continue to express their sorrow but fail to take the responsibility in the way that a responsible, open and transparent government should.

So what is it that they do not want people to know? What is it that they are afraid that people will see in releasing their diaries and their lobbyists register for those periods? That documentation would otherwise be available except it would cost taxpayers thousands and thousands of dollars to get it through right to information access. So the information is there, it can simply be released and the questions can be laid to rest. But until the opposition leader and her team agree to provide that information, the question mark remains. What did they know? How much did they know? The failure to release the information condemns them as continuing to blindly support the previous government and its failure to admit that it got it so badly wrong when it comes to the Health payroll system.