




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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ELECTORAL REFORM AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (6.17 pm): I rise to speak to the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013. I think all members who vote for this bill are going to be judged very harshly, and I think in time that the people who vote for this bill tonight will not be proud of their actions.

I can speak with some authority on this issue because I am part of a minor party that has grown in the last few years, and I think this bill is addressing the emergence of parties like the one I am a part of and trying to remove them or exclude them from the political landscape. We felt that parts of society were being under-represented and that, as the two major parties have gravitated towards the middle, their interests were not being properly represented. We gathered a lot of support in that time. Some 500,000 Queenslanders chose to vote for parties other than Labor and LNP in the last state election, and about 250,000 voted for our party because they were looking for a different set of values. We represented those values, and I think that is a healthy part of the process. I would defend the rights of people who were trying to get into that landscape as well, even if I did not agree with their opinions. I think it is a very healthy part of the process, and to think that someone who has a 'born to rule' attitude is terribly unhealthy for our system.

It should be said that our system was never built to have two parties; it was built to have four or five parties and to widely represent the broad and diverse range of views that are out there, whether we agree with them or not.

This bill specifically targets minor parties and those that want to grow organically, and it makes it almost impossible for them to grow. We found it very difficult starting our party. We were targeting representing people who were not big on cash—that is, not the big end of town—and that \$12,399 figure is not going to hurt them because it was hard to get money out of people who very strongly supported us, because for many of them that is why they wanted us to represent them because they are going broke in their respective industries. In terms of the four per cent going up to 10 per cent and down to six per cent, why do it? The only reason for doing it is to keep small people out of the market. Guess what? The Liberals were small once; Labor was small once. Ideologies grow and they should be contested in the parliament. No-one has the right to shut them out. We have seen movement after movement from this government attacking our party. We lost our resources in 2012. It is perverse and history will judge this government's actions very harshly in that respect.

I will now go through parts of the bill. With regard to removing caps on donations and expenditure, I do not think it could be said better than has already been said. I cannot help but again quote Professor Graeme Orr saying that politics is not a free market in consumer goods. People should be able to go out in the community and shake hands, talk to people in the pub, tell them what they stand for and get voted for like that, not presidential style elections that are won by getting these large corporate donations. I am told that the LNP has amassed some \$30 million in this term which to me speaks volumes and is obscene, and I am sure the same happened with Labor in the past. I think it is unhealthy. We should be judged on our merits going to the ballot box, not by how many leaflets we put in letterboxes. With regard to increasing the candidate deposit retention threshold from

four per cent to 10 per cent, effectively the government is telling the general public, 'Don't have a go, mate. People might like you, but you just haven't got the profile. We don't want you to have a go because you're unlikely to get your money back and you probably can't afford to run.' Two or three elections later, that person might make a fine politician. The government is removing that incentive for them to have a go, and I do not know what the benefit is. It will not save any money because it is putting in place the biannual policy development fund. It is beyond me why it would do it other than it is attacking minor parties. It is a bullying tactic where it thinks that only two people belong in a schoolyard and no-one else.

Dr Douglas: Dirty money.

Mr KATTER: It is dirty money. It is going to be judged very harshly in the public and I think the government is really damaging itself politically with that. In terms of the electoral public funding to a dollar amount per vote at \$2.90 and \$1.45, I know I am being repetitious but it is the same point again. I believe very strongly in the role that Independents play in this parliament. I think they do a tremendous job and it is healthy. Even if people agree with the set-up we have at the moment, it is very healthy to have Independents and minor parties to challenge the mainstream views and offer a different opinion. I think that is very healthy for the system, but this makes it very hard for us to operate and exist. I just think that that is bad for the system, is very cynical and perverse.

With regard to increasing the donation disclosure threshold from \$1,000 to \$12,400, the debate has been started in the United States that there is too much corporate influence in the government and it is trying to reverse this trend. We are enlightened enough in Queensland to go the other direction in that we are welcoming larger corporate type donors to come into the marketplace and if they throw their money around they can express more influence. People put money in for a reason and larger corporate donors especially will expect a return on that investment, and there is no denying it. In terms of introducing the biannual policy development funding, this is the real clanger. This defies any sort of rationale or logic. I do not even know how to talk about this without sounding entirely cynical, but I am told that it could end up retrospectively adding \$3.5 million to the LNP coffers and \$2 million to Labor Party coffers this year. We have had our staff taken off us. I have an electorate the size of France—a third of Queensland. I have to race back here from my electorate to read these bills with no staff or assistance. The government ripped our staff off us. It legislated in the dark of the night and now it is making it harder again for us to win elections or anyone else like us to have a go. It is unfair and—

Dr Douglas: Anti democratic.

Mr KATTER: It is very anti democratic. I keep saying: those opposite will be judged very harshly by the public on this. There is no sugar coating it and it is out there. More importantly, they will be judged harshly in history as well, and I do not think they will be proud of themselves in 10 years time when they look back at what they have done here tonight. Of course I will be vehemently opposing this bill.

The other issue is people needing to have identification to vote. Obviously that is a big issue for me because Mornington Island and Doomadgee are in my electorate. I am guilty of it myself often, but I think one of the biggest problems we have in dealing with many of the Indigenous issues is that we discount their value. Whilst many lower socioeconomic people might have problems with alcoholism and be really down and out and might not be able to maintain that identification on election day, many of them would surprise you and still have an opinion and still feel very strongly about their vote. The feedback I have received from those communities before is that one thing they find very important is their right to vote. The evidence for that is there because the turnout to vote in Doomadgee and Mornington is surprising.

Dr Douglas: They fought for it for 100 years.

Mr KATTER: Well, I can tell members that many of them will be ineligible. It is going to be really disappointing to see that. I will be trying my best to ensure that they have ID, but again I do not think that that has been taken into account. I think that will be very unfair on those people. I vehemently oppose this bill. I think it reflects terribly poorly on the government and anyone else who votes for it. This is adding to one of the most cynical days I have experienced in this parliament.