




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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ELECTORAL REFORM AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.29 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill. I have been looking forward to this debate for some time. In fact, I have been looking forward to this debate since 2006 when I was serving as an elected councillor on the Gold Coast City Council. At that time the council was subjected to an unnecessary and expensive investigation into campaign donations, conflict of interest laws and a whole range of other issues by a Labor government that was more intent on creating a smokescreen for its own poor performance than it ever was in any real, serious electoral reform. What we saw was that some \$8 million of taxpayers' money was wasted on an inquiry that went nowhere. No prosecutions came out of that particular inquiry and there were no real outcomes. In fact, of the 117 plus recommendations that came out of the CMC inquiry, the then Labor government adopted fewer than 20 and those that they did adopt were watered down to such an extent that I would suggest that much of the process was quite meaningless. The reforms were there to just try to save face and restore some degree of credibility in the fact that they wasted so much money on an inquiry that really went nowhere. It seems to me that with Labor there are two sets of rules, and I saw that in council. There was one set of rules for state parliament and then there was a whole other set of rules for local councils. What we saw at the time was a massive Beattie smokescreen which was all about propping up Gold Coast seats and diverting attention away from the state members of the day and doing that at the expense of hardworking councillors on the Gold Coast.

My record as a councillor and a former mayoral candidate on the Gold Coast is undisputed, and I was one of the first councillors to disclose all of the details of election contributions prior to an election. When I ran for mayor in 2008 we would declare all donations as they came in, online, prior to the election and long before the former government introduced any reforms or suggested that there needed to be any tightening up of the way that councils declared their donations. At the time I worked hard to raise a lot of support from the community. It does not matter whether it is \$40 or \$1,000; what is really at stake is the heartbeat behind the person supporting you. I encouraged many people to get behind me, as many did; hundreds of people supported my mayoral campaign, just as they subsequently supported my 2012 campaign when I was elected to this House. I think every donation is important and every donor is important. Regardless of whether someone puts in a little or a lot, we should never discount their opinion or their views.

Let's talk about Labor's record on electoral reform and accountability in respect of conflict of interest and personal conflicts. We saw the debacle over Gordon Nuttall and in the past we have also seen former senior ranking Labor ministers ending up in jail for all sorts of things. The reforms relating to the Gold Coast City Council and other councils back in 2006-07 took things to an extreme. Not that long ago one of my former council colleagues on the Gold Coast was sharing a recent incident with me in which council spent 50 minutes debating whether or not someone had a conflict of interest

because a planner who was involved in helping prepare an application on behalf of a developer had been best man at his wedding 27 years earlier. The debate went on for about half an hour. Then the mayor had to use his casting vote to decide whether or not the councillor could come back in and vote on the matter. Just as they thought they had resolved the issue and decided they would not let him back in, one of the other councillors suddenly stood up and realised they had a conflict of interest and had to abstain from voting on whether or not there was a conflict of interest. Sometime around midnight that day or later in the evening council finally got around to debating the matter of the day, which was whether or not they should approve the development application and, more importantly, whether they would create the opportunity for jobs.

I note the member for Mackay used his adjournment speech—and I have raised this previously—to have a go at me about an initiative that I and some local business people undertook to get out there and really start promoting my electorate and creating some interest and investment in Southport. What a cheap shot that was from the member for Mackay. That is what Labor does.

Let's talk about the 2012 state election and the last lot of electoral reforms we had. We saw the previous government change the laws to restrict our ability to campaign while at the same time fleecing the union funds and creating a structure in which the unions could pretty much contribute whatever they wanted so they could manipulate the rules and maximise their own exposure. What we saw was absolutely hypocritical and completely undemocratic. I ask the House: how much say does a young tradesman who pays union dues have as to where the union donations are spent and how they are used? I am sure there are many young tradesmen out there who perhaps would not even consider the investment in a Labor election fund as being a necessary, fair or reasonable way to spend their money.

These reforms that are before the House today basically bring Queensland into line with broadly accepted practices embraced by both sides of federal politics. These are essentially the same rules adopted by the Rudd government or the Gillard government. They are the same rules and principles that the current federal Leader of the Opposition has supported. So I fail to see what is the problem. I am all in favour of seeing a system put in place that standardises the approach to electoral funding and that standardises the disclosure requirements. It is not like we are saying that large donors should not be declared. We are saying that there are some limits. Then if there are significant contributors who do have a clear interest, those interests will be declared and they will be made public, as they should be.

I work hard for my community and I have sacrificed a great deal to represent my community. I am very honoured and blessed to have family and friends, constituents and local businesses who all want to pitch in and help me. I fail to see why any one of them should be considered any less or more appropriate to be a supporter. What we are fundamentally talking about here is the concept of freedom of speech or freedom of choice. I think it is a fundamental tenet of this great, free democratic nation of ours. I believe that if businesses want to get behind one side of politics then they should be allowed to do that. Around 2004 and 2008 I certainly saw plenty of businesses getting behind the previous Labor government with their chequebooks and I did not hear Labor squealing too much about whether they should be accepting that money back in the day. They were all too happy to take those donations, but there was no disclosure around any of those donations, and that really is the fundamental issue that we are debating here today. Our government is more accountable than the Labor government of the past has ever been. Our ministers make their diaries publicly available. We have gone all out as a government to make sure that we are the most accountable and transparent government that this state has ever seen. So these electoral reforms are further evidence of our commitment to having a fair system, a balanced system, but also retaining reasonable levels of accountability that I think are absolutely appropriate.

The objectives of this bill are to create a fairer and more level playing field. I believe it is absolutely appropriate that each and every Queenslanders has the right to express their support for us, Labor, PUP, Katter or an Independent as that is a fundamental pillar—principle—of the democratic process. Some demonstrate their support in dollars; some demonstrate their support in service and volunteering. One person in my last campaign took six months off university to work full time on my campaign. What a great support that is. How do you put a monetary value on that level of support? Why would you even want to diminish the value of that level of support by defining it as some sort of monetary transaction? People contribute as they can and as they will. I think it is absolutely appropriate that we allow people from all walks of life to support not just us but all sides of politics.

We have touched on the fact that the Premier and our ministers have raised the bar in terms of openness and accountability. Our government has initiated the Open Data website where we are making important government information publicly available so that it can be commercialised. I do not believe that Queenslanders have anything to fear in respect of this legislation and in respect of our heartbeat and our passion to see real electoral reform and create a much more level playing field here in Queensland.