




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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ELECTORAL REFORM AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.37 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013. Firstly, I commend the Attorney-General on the extraordinarily thorough research and consultation done prior to formulating this bill. Although I was not a member of parliament at the time, it is evident to any observer that such consultation certainly appears to have been lacking prior to the former Labor government rushing in electoral reform legislation before the 2012 election. This bill seeks to ensure that Queensland has an electoral system with high standards of integrity and accountability at the same time as encouraging a higher rate of participation. I will address some of the key changes proposed by this legislation, and it is a pleasure to do so.

Firstly, I support any development that makes the process of reporting and accounting for donations and campaign expenditure less cumbersome, more transparent and easier for more people to participate. I am sure that there are many who would echo those sentiments. By removing the caps on donations we are able to do away with an unnecessary restriction and, by increasing the disclosure threshold to a level in line with that applied federally, we are reducing the administration burden on many donors while still maintaining the threshold at a realistic benchmark level.

I might also note that, as a first-term member of parliament, should I be fortunate enough to be re-elected next time around I welcome the Attorney General's advice that reporting after the election will be much more simplified. I also welcome the return to a stated dollar amount per vote for electoral public funding. I was astounded to learn that the Queensland public were forced to pay out \$24.5 million in public funding to political parties and candidates in 2012 after paying just \$3.5 million in 2009. This was as a direct result of the electoral reforms rushed through by the former Labor government with very little scrutiny.

Another area in which I get a great deal of feedback from constituents around the time of any election—whether it be state, local, or federal—is the degree of credibility of some candidates. My response to that is that we all live in a democratic society and any person who meets the eligibility criteria is entitled to run for office, and I support that notion. However, I also believe that that right also needs to be balanced with a demonstrated commitment by the candidate to serve in his or her community. Voting Queenslanders deserve to have a field of quality candidates to choose from who, by their actions, have gained some credible level of support within the community that they would represent. By increasing the eligibility threshold for public funding from four per cent to six per cent of the primary vote, I believe that we have struck a good balance between the basic right of any eligible person to run for office and encouraging candidates who are actively involved in, and aware of, the issues in their communities.

I turn now to some of the practical measures contained in this bill that will make the electoral process more accessible and fairer for the voters of Queensland—many of whom currently struggle to be involved due to their personal circumstances. Of course, electronic voting is a development with the potential to give those with vision and hearing impairments the ability to vote without assistance and confidentiality like the majority of people are able to do. However, as much as I would like to see

such developments in place as soon as possible, I again commend the Attorney-General on his due diligence and research with respect to issues such as security. While it might be tempting to rush such systems into place, we need to make sure that integrity is vital. I hope that we are at least able to achieve the goal of having some trial sites ready for the 2015 election. Gazing into the future when the time comes that all Queenslanders have the option of voting electronically, I might speculate that many will probably shirk technology, particularly those constituents who do not like it, and of course we all like the tradition of turning up at a polling booth not only for the banter but also to enjoy the barbecues.

I also appreciate the provision in the bill for changes to make postal voting easier, particularly for those who are elderly and frail and for those with a disability that prevents them from attending a polling booth. We always need to be respectful of those people in our communities. With regard to those who are able to attend polling booths, the vast majority of people do the right thing, but we all know there are those in the minority who seek to defraud the electoral system by claiming to be someone they are not and voting at multiple booths. Currently the system for detecting these people is laborious and quite often unsuccessful. The proof of identity requirement that will be introduced as a result of this legislation is a long-overdue development that will bolster the integrity of the system.

Finally, I welcome the measures that will be put in place to allow for greater scrutiny of how-to-vote cards before polling day. Overwhelming the feedback to me as the local member for Burnett is that people want to get rid of how-to-vote cards. I can hope one day that we get to a happy place with that legislative framework.

The requirement to publish cards on the Electoral Commission's website not only gives postal voters access to that information but gives all voters a greater opportunity to view the cards beforehand and determine a course of action for themselves. We also welcome the opportunities to have our volunteers on election day or prepolls not being harassed and being kicked around by those overzealous campaigners particularly from other parties. Combined with the Electoral Commission's power to refuse to register a how-to-vote card if it is likely to deceive or mislead, this will greatly increase the usefulness of these cards.

In closing, I once again commend the Attorney-General and his staff for their research and consultation efforts prior to formulating this bill. It represents a fantastic opportunity to bolster the integrity and efficiency of the Queensland electoral system.