




Speech By  
**Steve Minnikin**

**MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH**

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**ELECTORAL REFORM AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (4.14 pm): I am pleased to speak in favour of the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill. The Attorney-General has once again done a great job in fixing up the mistakes of the previous ALP government which was rather fond of policy on the run. Our reforms bring Queensland into line with Commonwealth requirements. The rushed amendments to the Electoral Reform and Accountability Amendment Act 2011 are a prime example of the previous Labor government's incompetent attitude to policy development and implementation. With an imminent election in their sights, the former ALP government sought to make significant changes to the rules that affected electoral expenditure, political donations and public funding of elections. It is crystal clear that the previous administration sought to unashamedly disadvantage other political parties which do not rely on union funding to fund their campaign efforts.

The Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013 has two primary policy objectives that it wishes to fulfil. Firstly, this amendment bill seeks to ensure that Queenslanders are given the best opportunity to fully partake in the electoral process and, secondly, boost integrity and accessibility when it comes to casting that all important vote at the ballot box when undertaking one's democratic duty. Currently, voters are not compelled to provide identification when receiving their ballot paper. Therefore, implementing verification of a voter's identity will significantly decrease the risk of voter impersonation. There has been some concern in some sections of the community over the requirements of proof of identity. However, as a government which is prepared to listen, this amendment caters for all sections of the community, ensuring that a variety of documentation can be utilised to establish a person's entitlement to vote. The LNP government and I, as the member for Chatsworth, have not stopped listening to Queenslanders and that will never change. We value the contributions from Queenslanders, and that is why we have encouraged people to have their say via the discussion papers and our electorate officers.

It is important when striving to have a transparent electoral system that mechanisms are in place to provide checks and balances for both the confidence of the voting public and the integrity of the electoral processes. Therefore, this amendment bill will implement a requirement for political parties to lodge their how-to-vote card with the Electoral Commission of Queensland. It recognises that how-to-vote cards are an important part of the election process. Therefore, it is critical that voters are given the true and correct facts in which to make an informed, democratic decision.

For too long the voting public has been bombarded with misleading how-to-vote cards and this has subsequently tied up unnecessary time seeking injunctions and wasting invaluable time in court. It hinders the ability of a voter to make an educated decision on how to cast their all-important vote. Individuals who are not successful in submitting their how-to-vote cards will be given an opportunity to submit revised documents to the Electoral Commission of Queensland.

The opposition will try to register their opposition to this legislation and it just proves that they do not want Queensland to have a fair and transparent voting system. They are happy to accept

thousands of dollars from unions yet try to stifle individuals and businesses who seek to participate in the electoral process. I again take this opportunity to remind the House that the eight opposite in the chamber are members of a party that thought it was acceptable to rush through electoral reform without public consultation.

Let us compare and contrast. The Newman government, in comparison, has spent nearly a year releasing two parts of a discussion paper to ensure that everyone has been given ample opportunity to have their say on these important reforms. Another important aspect of this amendment bill is the cost saving to the taxpayer. The legislation will seek to increase the entitlement threshold for public funding from four per cent to six per cent of the primary vote. Hence the taxpayer will not foot the bill for individuals who poll a significantly low portion of the primary vote. Even though everyone has the right to put themselves forward to represent their community—moreover, it is their fundamental democratic right—it is not fair that the community should carry the monetary burden. As differing political parties compete against each other to govern this great state of Queensland, it is important that we respect the democratic process to ensure everyone has a level playing field. That is exactly what this amendment bill seeks to do for Queenslanders by ensuring that we are actively promoting democratic participation for all.

I am delighted that electronic voting will be introduced for Queensland voters who require assistance when casting their vote. Even though they may have impairment it does not mean they should be democratically disadvantaged at the ballot box. Electronic voting will give these voters a sense of independence and control over their ballot paper ensuring that it is flexible to meet their specific needs.

I am confident that education and voter awareness will become a priority after this amendment bill is passed—therefore ensuring that before the next state election all Queenslanders will have total confidence in the changes made to improve the voting process. This amendment bill will ensure that no individual is disadvantaged in the electoral system process.

I congratulate the Attorney-General for having the insight to bring forward an amendment bill that will ensure that the Queensland electoral system is regarded as one of integrity and one which has the highest accountability mechanisms. It is important that all political parties and individuals who seek public office are held to account, especially when there is opportunity to undertake the true honour of representing Queenslanders.

I would also like to place on record my greatest appreciation to all of those Queenslanders who submitted over 250 submissions in response to the discussion paper released in 2013. Extensive public consultation has been crucial in developing this amendment bill as it affects all Queenslanders and their right to cast that all-important vote on polling day. As someone who has worked on nearly all local, state and federal elections since 1989, it is my great pleasure as the member for Chatsworth to add my support to this much needed piece of legislative reform.