




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2016

CRIME AND CORRUPTION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (6.11 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the shadow minister for infrastructure, planning, small business, employment and trade and the member for Clayfield, Tim Nicholls. So here we go again: another ill-informed Labor Party policy—policy on the run—that will rip the heart out of small business in regional Queensland; another disastrous policy that will close down the heart and soul of many regional towns across my electorate. Labor's crazy plan to merge Energex and Ergon and then allow the new company to unfairly bid against local regional sparkies for bread-and-butter electrical work shows the contempt they have for small business and country towns—

Mr SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Gregory, one moment, please. I can hardly hear you, but I can certainly hear the member for Nanango. I can also hear the Minister for Innovation. Member for Nanango, one of the problems with sitting so close to me is that I hear a lot of your idle chatter. I realise that other members who sit further away I do not hear and I have given you a pretty high degree of latitude. I would urge you not to take advantage of that.

Mr MILLAR: This is a very passionate issue, of course, for our regional communities. These are bread-and-butter electrical works that our sparkies do. This absolutely shows the contempt that the Labor Party has for small business and country towns right across this state. We will now see Labor direct all government departments to use this government owned, taxpayer funded monstrosity, putting hundreds of small businesses and families out of a job, out of income and forced to leave these regional towns because the Labor Party's decision to allow this to happen will give them no choice but to find work in bigger cities.

In my electorate we are already well serviced by hardworking mum-and-dad contractors who compete on a level playing field and employ locals, including up-and-coming apprentices, and provide important services to our local community. In the seat of Gregory we have people like Bill White, who has been in a successful local electrical business on the Central Highlands for 30 years employing local people. We have Enwise Electrical, a company established by a young family over 10 years ago, who employ local people, local apprentices and who generate income for the local families in Emerald. We have people like Scott Black, whose business has embraced the renewable energy sector and has invested heavily into setting up his business employing local people. We have Belyando Electrical in Clermont, a mum-and-dad operation, with decades of service to our local community. We have Peak Downs Electrics in Capella, Scott Armstrong in Blackall and Saunders Electrics in Longreach. These businesses are under threat because the Labor Party wants to move in on them and send them out of town.

What about smaller communities like Barcaldine, Longreach, Tambo, and Blackall where there are only one or two electricians in town? Their work includes government work at schools, government offices and government accommodation facilities. That work is critical for their business. Labor plans to

put these contractors in an impossible position of competing against the Ergon-Energex giant. This is not good for competition. Less competition means one thing: higher prices. These people will be run out of town and the only businesspeople will rely on is Ergon, and Energex and the price will be so high that they will not be able to afford it.

Out in the bush towns it means people will have to sell up and move away. Not only does it have an impact on those families but also the whole town. One less family means less kids at the local school, less money spent at the local supermarket and one less family playing sport. Surely the first priority for these electricity companies is getting the basics right which for regional Queensland is a secure power supply, not continuously experiencing outages in the west. We do not want them branching into services already provided by local electricians who are doing a good job.

Many people will see this as a potential abuse of market power by the state government setting up its own business to compete head-to-head with small electrical businesses. Our e-petition to the Queensland parliament calls on the state government not to throw Queensland small businesses and their workers under the bus. Mum-and-dad businesses would never be able to afford to borrow the money to sustain losses in the same way the state government can. The only possible result from head-to-head competition is small businesses would be sent to the wall.

Here is an idea for Ergon and Energex: they should be concentrating on making sure the electricity supply in Western Queensland is continuous and does not continue to go through the electricity outages that we have seen for the last 12 months. When we talk about outages of electricity we are talking about 24, 48 or 72 hours. That has an impact not only on mums and dads but also on businesses. I suggest that the government concentrate on making sure that the supply is continuous and we do not see outages. Do not go into a market where we already have good small businesses who are competing in that market and doing a good job. How about concentrating on getting the initial job done first and making sure that we have continuous electricity. Do not sell out small business in Western Queensland; we need them.