




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 15 May 2018

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (COUNCILLOR COMPLAINTS) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL
(IMPLEMENTING STAGE 1 OF BELCARRA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (5.41 pm): Today I rise to speak in support of the amendments of the member for Toowoomba South and to call out the Palaszczuk government on its double standards relating to political donations. All political parties receive donations, as shown on the ECQ website. We can see clearly that the majority of LNP donors are individuals while the majority of Labor donors are unions. Therefore, I find it hard to accept that the objective of this legislation is to improve transparency when this legislation is targeted at only one section of the community and when it ignores the influence that unions and other sectors of the community have on the political process.

If we are to believe that the intent of this legislation is to increase transparency, integrity and accountability, then why wouldn't unions be listed as prohibited donors, just as developers would be under this rushed and politically motivated legislation? The answer is quite simple: such a course of action does not suit this government. Time and time again we have seen that this government will do whatever suits its interests, rather than putting the interests of the people Queensland ahead of its own.

Following the Belcarra review, the focus of which was local government only, the CCC concluded that the risk of actual or perceived corruption relating to developer donations to local councillors was real and the intent of this legislation as it relates to developer donation bans is to stop developers bribing their way through the developmental approval process, which is the jurisdiction of local government and not the state. In its submission to the Economics and Governance Committee, the CCC made it clear that the inquiry's terms of reference did not include state elections and, consequently, the Belcarra report recommendations did not involve any detailed consideration of corruption risks at state elections and decision-making. Therefore, rather than act in the best interests of Queenslanders, this government decided to use the Belcarra report as a political tool to further entrench and protect the unions in the political process, while demonising developers.

The Premier has decided to target one section of society by randomly coming up with ways of criminalising their participation in democracy. Corrupt politicians and councils were the real focus of the Belcarra review and it is of no surprise that, as a result, allegedly corrupt Labor politicians have been flushed out of local governments throughout Queensland. This is good news for democracy and for the people of the communities that those allegedly corrupt politicians should have been representing.

The High Court has said that there needs to be an evidence based response that is proportional to the threat identified. How can the unions be exempt from this assessment of threat to political corruption? Unions control who gets into a Labor government cabinet and which portfolios ministers get. They have been proven to directly and overtly influence legislation in areas such as penalty rates and trading hours. They were behind the creation of anticompetitive government owned

EnergyAustralia so that the ETU could expand its membership base and undermine mum-and-dad businesses. We have seen ministers taking their riding orders from union bosses through improper means such as their mangocube6 personal email account.

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr MICKELBERG: Thank you, member for Whitsunday; I take that interjection. Unions bankroll Labor election campaigns, so how on earth can they be excluded from policies and processes that are designed to improve political transparency and avoid the perception of influence?

The independent chair of the CCC, Mr Alan MacSporran, even raised concerns regarding the application of the ban on property developer donations at the state level when he said—

... we said in one line in the early part of our report that the government may wish to consider translating or expanding it to the state sector. We did not mean by that that it is an automatic translation, what we meant is that it needs to be considered in that sector, which should be an evidence gathering exercise, public consultation, sufficient to get a sense of what is really happening in that area. There is no reason in principle why the measures should not translate to the state, but that needs to be considered because absent consideration of it there is a potential successful challenge to the constitutional validity of the measure. That is the concern we simply had, that you cannot simply automatically translate it without giving it due consideration.

Through its actions, this government has shown that it could not care less about due consideration and investigation. The rushed inquiry process into this bill has been a farce, with even the ECQ failing to answer questions publicly.

Put simply, the aspects of this bill that seek to target property developers are politically motivated, which is evidenced by the fact that this bill was introduced two weeks before a state election and more than two years before the next local government election. If the Premier wants to demonstrate that the ban on developer donations at a state level is not politically motivated, she should accept the advice of the independent CCC chair and undertake an inquiry into state political donations before introducing bans at a state level. After all, the Premier did promise such an inquiry in 2015 and still she has not upheld that promise.

In terms of the information contained within the Local Government (Councillor Complaints) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I support the amendments contained in the bill as clearly the proposed changes seek to make a complex area less problematic. Like most of those who sit in this chamber, most councillors nominate for election because they seek to conscientiously and honestly serve their communities. In my own electorate, the work of Councillor Hungerford and Councillor Dickson is a testament to their dedication to the community in which they live and work.

Any conduct by elected representatives that diminishes trust and confidence in our local representatives should be dealt with swiftly and harshly; however, such an approach must be tempered to ensure that transparency and accountability remain the bedrock under which such behaviour is judged. Local governments share many of the same goals as the LNP. We both want to create jobs, build safe and livable communities, and protect our way of life. The LNP has always been a strong supporter of local government and we have always sought to work in partnership with councils and the LGAQ to deliver for our respective constituencies. We will continue to do so.

The people of Queensland deserve transparency and it is imperative that we build confidence in the electoral process. That is why I am supportive of those aspects of the proposed bills that address legitimate concerns. Earlier, the minister for state development mentioned the real issue of declining public confidence in the electoral process. I agree. It is a real issue that must be addressed; however, the abuse of process that has been exhibited in using this legislation for pure political advantage is the very reason that people have lost confidence. For that reason, I support the amendments moved by the member for Toowoomba South and I implore those opposite to put themselves above this dismal attempt to garner political advantage.