




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.57 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate on these two bills. I am left with little option, unfortunately, but to start by responding to the member for Toohey's contribution yesterday. I will agree with the member for Toowoomba South that it was a bizarre contribution, but I do not think that description quite does it justice. The member is speaking in a debate on his own government's legislation and the best he can come up with is baseless smear and inconsequential historical nonsense. It was a bit pathetic, to be honest.

Now we have the member for Waterford chiming in as well. These incisive questions from the member for Toohey were about as hard hitting as wet lettuce, but I thank him for the opportunity to respond and set the record straight once and for all in terms of the issues he has raised. We can only assume that that will not be the end of it. The Deputy Premier will continue to trot out each of her loyal backbenchers to defend her honour against the rising green tide in South Brisbane to protect her job.

Before we adjourn for lunch I want to ask why it is that the member for Toohey was so fixated on a few donations that took place nearly two years ago. Let us put it in context. Queensland Labor received more than \$7.23 million in donations during the previous reporting year. The LNP received more than \$11.2 million in the same term, as I understand it. Let us put the amount of money that the member for Toohey is concerned about in context. The Deputy Premier herself contributed a similar amount to her own campaign. These are not big sums of money. I can confirm on the record for the member for Toohey that for almost two years now, since the last federal election in 2016, the Queensland Greens have not accepted any corporate donations. Since the start of the state election campaign we have had a formal policy of not accepting corporate donations.

Mr Power interjected.


Mr BERKMAN: If the member for Logan wants to keep his pants on I will get there in time.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar!

Mr BERKMAN: I withdraw that. I am proud to stand here as the only representative of a party with a policy to ban corporate donations. I am proud to stand here as the only representative of a party that took no corporate donations in the state election campaign.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have reached the lunchbreak. I will ask you to resume your seat. Members we will break until two o'clock when we will continue on with this debate.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.00 pm.

 **Mr BERKMAN:** As I was saying before the break, I am proud to be here representing the only party that, in policy and in practice, refuses corporate donations. My campaign in Maiwar was run without a single dollar from corporate donations; it was run on donations from real people who believe in Greens values and share our ambition and vision for a better future for everyone in Queensland.

Attempts from either side of the House to attack the Greens on this issue, and in particular the contribution of the member for Toohey, give the clearest possible indication we could have that they understand community sentiment on this issue. Otherwise, why would they bother? They understand that the community wants to see big corporate money out of politics. They understand that their cover is blown and that people will continue to demand that government puts people over profits. However, instead of focusing on the issues and seeking to fix the problem comprehensively, the member for Toohey is trying to throw sand in everyone's eyes and look everywhere but at his own party. He conspicuously averts his attention from the two Labor mayors of Ipswich who are now up on corruption charges.

The member for Toohey's ridiculous smear about the so-called laundering of donations through federal party bodies is just laughable. If he really does require an explanation, here it is and it is pretty simple: the Australian Greens raise money for Queensland based on state issues or campaigns. They do this through a national mailing list, taking donations from individuals. Those donations are then transferred to the state party, but the ECQ requires it to be recorded as a contribution from the Australian Greens. I will put this on the record, too: this morning, the national party confirmed that all of the donations sent to Queensland were from individuals. Every donation from the federal party since the last federal election was from individuals. I am not going to table those identities.

I am not going to disclose the identity of each and every individual donor to the Australian Greens. As a party, we are operating in accordance with the ECQ's directions and those small donors have a right to their privacy. The way that the member for Waterford is smearing individual donors and trying to shame them for what she thinks she knows about how they are employed or how they have made their money is ample justification to refuse to take that step. If there are concerns about so-called laundering, why does the government not legislate to deal with it? After all, we are here looking at its legislation.

Members should make no mistake that I believe this legislation goes nowhere near far enough. People want to see a cap on the amount spent on elections and less rubbish in their mailboxes and at the polling booths on election day. People want to see a meaningful cap on all donations from businesses, unions, individuals—everyone.

Going back to the member for Toohey's interrogation, it is clear to everyone that donations from individuals are different from corporate donations. People have actual values and political preferences. They have ethical drivers to engage with and support one party over the other. The same might be said of unions, but companies do not. They cannot. They only value profit. As I said a moment ago in my introduction, directors of listed companies are compelled by law—they are duty bound—to maximise profits for their shareholders over all else. They cannot give this kind of money unless it is going to improve returns for shareholders.

In the context of the millions and millions of donations given to Labor and the LNP, personal donations to the Greens are the least of anyone's concerns. However, to the extent that anyone is concerned about donations from individuals to the Greens, our policy is that they should all be capped to improve public confidence in the system. I intend to bring further legislation to this effect. I would welcome the support of the government, and the member for Toohey, to improve the integrity of Queensland's political system.

I wish to consider just a couple of excerpts from the Belcarra report. It states that donations are motivated by a desire to purchase direct influence in government decision-making. They are motivated by a desire to purchase access to decision-makers. Further on, it states that there is a risk of corruption where these rights of access morph into the adoption of policies designed to materially benefit those to whom access has been given, rather than to advance the broader public interest. That is logical, rational and essentially undeniable reasoning from the CCC. Those concerns are not relevant only to donations from developers. The state government clearly has control over policies that can materially benefit or disadvantage all corporate actors in Queensland.

For all the chatter about the absence of actual corruption risks, the CCC makes it clear that risks do not relate just to actual corruption but also to the perceived risk of corruption. If the community perceives that there is a risk that any donations are influencing government decision-making, and in my experience a huge portion of the population feels that way, then that perception requires a response. The community has to have confidence in the system and they will not until corporate influence is removed from politics.

I agree with members of the opposition that the decision to confine this donation ban to developers is a deliberate and unjustifiably targeted approach to donation reform that is ultimately designed to give Labor an advantage over the LNP. The result is that we are making only small steps towards genuine reform in the interests of accountability and integrity.

A number of members, including the Leader of the Opposition, have mentioned the failure of this government to follow through on its commitment to the former member for Nicklin that it would conduct an inquiry into all political donations. It was only in the last sitting week in this House that I called on the government and the opposition to kickstart precisely that kind of inquiry. The government has done nothing over its entire last term and in the two weeks since that point we have heard not a peep from the government or the opposition. Again, I call on both the government and the opposition to use the powers that they clearly have to instigate an investigation on this.

A bipartisan request from government and opposition members of the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee could compel the CCC to look at the influence of all political donations in Queensland. If the government and the opposition continue to refuse to take that step, what does that leave the people of Queensland to assume? Why is it that they are so concerned about shining a light on these political donations that they will not put the corruption watchdog on to it? What are they hiding?

Throughout the debate on this bill, government members have been banging on about how great the bill is for accountability and public confidence in our system, and it is a good bill. It is good legislation. It is an important start. However, all the cynical self-congratulations should be put aside. They should put their focus other than on me and the Greens, because the community is sick of the rot. It is unfortunate that I have used almost my entire contribution with these comments, because I broadly support the legislation. I am glad to support it because, by and large, although in a limited way, it improves accountability and should restore some community faith in our system.

I turn specifically to the councillor complaints legislation. The need for reform in this space could hardly be more apparent. Each week it seems there is another reason splashed across the front pages of our newspapers. I support the bill and commend the government and the committee for the work that they have done in bringing on this debate. The creation of the Independent Assessor and the Councillor Conduct Tribunal are welcome developments. I implore the minister to ensure that those bodies are adequately resourced to perform their functions at full capacity. The additional guidance proposed to be given to councils and councillors in the form of a code of conduct and model meeting procedures are also important developments. I am sure that councils, particularly those smaller councils that constantly struggle with resourcing, will appreciate those developments.

The minister has proposed amendments to introduce a ministerial power to dismiss or suspend a councillor in the public interest. I understand that the purpose, or at least the effect, of that provision is to put beyond doubt the minister's discretionary power to suspend or dismiss councillors, but I note it is a very broad discretion and power. I take it no further, other than to put on the record my strong preference for a provision such as this to come to the House with the benefit of—

(Time expired)