




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTORAL (IMPLEMENTING STAGE 2 OF
BELCARRA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (12.13 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the Local Government Electoral (Implementing Stage 2 of Belcarra) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Electoral and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. At the outset, let me be very clear: I and the LNP fully support the Queensland community's need and right to have confidence in their mayors, councillors and councils. As such, we support the amendments in this bill that implement the recommendations of the Belcarra report. We also believe that there needs to be a consistent degree of transparency and integrity at all levels of government, a view we thought the Premier shared because, to use her own words—

Queenslanders should have confidence and integrity of all levels of government ... I will not make rules for local councils that I am not prepared to follow myself, so any changes we make will apply to state as well as local government.

Had the Premier discovered that the proposed integrity laws contained in this bill applied to her government, the Premier would be down a Deputy Premier, two ministers and a committee chair. It is widely known that if the Deputy Premier were a mayor or a councillor she would be facing charges. If a mayor or a councillor failed to disclose the purchase of a property, then failed to declare a conflict of interest when sitting around the cabinet table and making decisions about Cross River Rail and the South Brisbane new high school, both of which had a tangible and real benefit to the value of that property, they would be at least under ongoing investigation but more likely charged.

Rather than applying those same standards to her Deputy Premier, yet again the Premier squibbed it and called on the Minister for Local Government to pull those amendments from this bill— or perhaps it was the Deputy Premier herself, because we all know who really calls the shots on that side of the House. Whoever it was, it is abundantly clear that, whilst the Palaszczuk Labor government is embroiled in integrity crisis after integrity crisis, they could not look themselves in the mirror if they had further upped the ante on mayors and councillors. It is back to the drawing board for those integrity amendments. That brings us to some of the other amendments brought in under the guise of integrity that have no connection whatsoever to the Belcarra report. They were all about political opportunism. Of course, I am referring to the introduction of compulsory preferential voting to council elections.

Again, let me be clear: the LNP does not support compulsory preferential voting; we support optional preferential voting. We believe it is the fairest form of voting. We believe voters should have the right to indicate an alternative preference, but we also believe that they should not have to if they do not want to. Sadly, only one other party in this chamber appears to be consistent in its position on compulsory preferential voting, albeit that they are for it—and that is the Greens. We know why the Greens support compulsory preferential voting. It is because they hold all the cards in their deals with the Labor Party when it comes to elections because the Labor Party desperately needs Greens preferences to win state seats. Whilst we disagree with that self-serving position, at least the Greens

are consistent, because the Labor Party definitely is not consistent on this matter. With 18 minutes notice, it was the Labor Party that introduced compulsory preferential voting into state elections. Let me quote the current Attorney-General from that debate. She said—

What we are putting forward today is reasonable and sensible and deals with that confusion that the community is talking about after each election about why there is compulsory preferential voting at one election and optional preferential voting at the next election. This is an opportunity to address this issue.

Not now, because when Queenslanders have had more than 18 minutes to consider their preferred means of casting their vote, what do we hear from the minister? Just yesterday, in this chamber—

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Pugh): Order!

Mr POWELL: When Queenslanders have had more than 18 minutes to consider this, what did the minister say? He said—

Over the last few months it has become clear that the majority of mayors, councillors and the LGAQ do not support the introduction of compulsory preferential voting for local government elections. During the committee process mayors or councillors representing 28 councils made submissions opposing the introduction of CPV.

The Premier, in particular, has been very receptive in listening to the feedback from the local government sector. As a result of the feedback, I will move amendments to the bill during consideration in detail to remove the provisions relating to compulsory preferential voting.

The message is clear: Queenslanders want optional preferential voting, be it for their state or local government elections. The message is also clear that the Labor Party manipulates the voting laws to benefit its election chances. It did it with compulsory preferential voting in 2016, and that helped it deliver the 2017 state election. This time it worked out that compulsory preferential voting would cost it wards in the 2020 Brisbane City Council election and would lead to a concerted campaign against the Palaszczuk Labor government in the lead-up to the 2020 state election. What has it done? It has run away. The Palaszczuk government is not guided, as the minister would have us believe, by the four key principles of integrity, transparency, diversity and consistency. It is guided by one principle: self-preservation.

Before moving on from compulsory preferential voting, I must ask where the Katter party stands on this matter. It was with the Katter party's support that compulsory preferential voting was added, at 18 minutes notice, to state laws. Where does the Katter party stand now? I suspect—in fact I know—that, like the Labor Party, it has only one interest in this matter, and that is self-interest.

Honourable members injected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Glass House, I can afford you as much protection as you deserve when you do not provoke members in this House.

Mr POWELL: In the time remaining to me I will briefly refer to the Electoral and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, particularly as it relates to prisoner voting. My colleagues have declared our position on this aspect of the bill. I have a number of questions that I would like the minister to address—in particular, what address prisoners who are serving less than three years will be voting from. The Labor Party has tried a few things to try to remove the LNP from the seat of Glass House, including introducing compulsory preferential voting and getting preferences from One Nation, but it would be a really interesting move if suddenly all of the prisoners in the Woodford Correctional Centre started voting for the Labor Party! To be fair to the minister, I know that there are very few prisoners in the Woodford Correctional Centre who are serving terms of less than three years, so it is not about self-interest; I am genuinely inquiring about which electorate the prisoners will be voting in. I think that is a fair question to ask when considering this bill.

I return to where I started. The minister wants us to believe that the Labor Party acts with consistency and integrity in this matter. What we have seen by the amendments that the minister has foreshadowed he will move in consideration in detail today is that there is no consistency or integrity in this matter. They are doing this to preserve the electoral opportunities of the Deputy Premier and ensure she remains the powerbroker she is within the Palaszczuk Labor government cabinet. They are doing this to ensure the Labor candidates at the Brisbane City Council election do not lose seats to the Greens. They are doing it because they did not want to face a backlash from mayors, councillors and councils right across this state who know what we know—that is, optional preferential voting is the fairest form of voting.