



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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

ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.22 pm): I rise to speak in support of these bills. I support the Belcarra bill because it will help us rebuild the faith of Queenslanders in local government. The faith of Queenslanders in local government, in my area at least, is currently pretty low. Their first assumption about a contentious or large decision of any kind is that councillors have been influenced, that perhaps their decision has been bought. Members can understand why people may think that. For example, Brisbane residents have seen their local plans being ignored in recent years. They see developments that do not fit within the local plans being approved all the time. You just have to look out the window over the river to the south and see these jarring monstrosities to wonder how they were ever approved.

It is no wonder that Queenslanders' faith in local government is currently low. This bill helps us rebuild it. It lays out a path that will increase the confidence of Queenslanders over coming years, but it will be a long and slow process. Only Labor can do it. It is only Labor that can drive integrity in local government. It is only Labor that will deliver the protections people want to see in local government. The LNP will always allow big donors to get their way. Only Labor will drive transparency. The LNP will always try to pull the curtains around who is trying to influence decisions.

Let us start with the issue of real-time disclosure. It used to be that only after a local government election would you get the real story of who made donations or gave money to candidates. Sometimes it would be months afterwards. By then it would often be too late to do anything about it or to influence a vote. The reforms in this bill will allow residents to track in real time who is making donations. This is crucial to rebuilding confidence.

Secondly, there will be the identification of teams in local government elections. This is important for residents. When people look at candidates across the board, they want to see who is working with whom, who has done a deal with other candidates, who is running together and what they really believe in. You cannot really call yourself a true Independent if you are one of a bunch of candidates who are sharing resources and sharing how-to-vote cards. This is important because in my community there has been a history of this in recent elections. These reforms will allow greater transparency, because voters will know for sure who will be working together as a team if they are elected.

Thirdly, there is a section amending the power of mayors when it comes to setting budgets and employing a CEO and senior executives. This is crucial. Currently the mayor is the person responsible for delivering the budget and appointing senior staff and the CEO. We have seen that this gives them enormous power. Mayors decide what goes into the budget and, crucially, what does not go into the budget. The CEO and senior staff are often reliant on the goodwill and support of the mayor. All of that real power is centralised into the mayor's office, leaving individual councillors very little power to effect change. These reforms will bring greater democracy and shared power to the council chamber and greater transparency.

Fourthly, the disclosure elements are critical. The banning of donations from developers is vitally important. It is here that we see the greatest difference between the LNP and Labor. The LNP will never be rigorous in enforcing this kind of transparency. It does not want people to know the true identity of its donors. Look at its track record today and this week. It has tried to hide the identity of people who gave it about \$3 million. It has had to return \$300,000 or \$500,000 in donations from developers and the like. Even after all this time, it keeps taking their money. It keeps taking money for state and council candidates and keeps forgetting to disclose it.

I looked at some of the exhibits tendered during the Belcarra hearings. I see on exhibits 13 and 14 that an LNP aligned candidate on the Gold Coast, Ms Boulton, received \$1,500 from the member for Southport. I do not know if our colleague revealed this in the register of interests. I table exhibits 13 and 14 from the Belcarra hearings along with an extract from the *Twenty-ninth report on the register of members' interests*, where the candidate lists the donations from the member, and the place in the register where it should be recorded.

Tabled paper: Document, undated, titled 'CCC Exhibit' [1839].

Tabled paper: Extract from the Twenty-Ninth Report on the Register of Members' Interests relating to the member for Southport, Mr Rob Molhoek MP [1840].

I note in these exhibits that there is \$15,000 from Stuart Robert and the Fadden Forum to this candidate. I could have run two local government election campaigns in my area with that kind of money. Ms Boulton got \$30,000 in total, I believe, from Stuart Robert and the Fadden Forum. I believe that another candidate got \$30,000 as well from Stuart Robert. That is \$60,000 from one LNP fundraising vehicle going to just two council candidates. This same fund received \$100,000 from a Gold Coast lobbyist who worked for developers and resource companies. We see that the LNP has a stream of donations going to local LNP candidates. It comes from—we do not exactly know where. The LNP does not think it is a priority for people to know where this money comes from. We do.

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.45 pm), continuing: I want to emphasise again that Queenslanders want to know about the money that is flowing to their candidates in local government elections. This bill ends the lack of transparency that exists currently and allows that information to be available for people who want to know about the candidates and where their money is coming from. This lack of transparency is what the LNP has wanted to preserve. Without real-time disclosure, without all the changes that we are bringing in, we will never know about these donations in a timely fashion, or perhaps never truly know where they come from.

Local government elections are around the corner. I know that in my area—the Moreton Bay area—some people are cynical. In talking to people, some of them assume the worst in a council's motivations and perhaps in the candidate seeking election. As someone who served for many years in that council area, I hope that cynicism and that assumption of the worst can be reversed in the years to come.

I know that many fine people, whether they are employees, or councillors, love being in local government and truly want to be part of building a better community. They want to see that rebuilding of confidence as well. The employees of councils want to create confidence in their councils and end the cynicism. If we do not bring in these Belcarra reforms, the current attitude will get worse. Cynicism will rule the roost. I already see some potential candidates in the Moreton Bay council area who want to mine that seam of cynicism and who are appealing to that cynicism in their election platform. They are only making the situation worse.

I loved my time in local government and I truly loved being able to change my community for the better. I do not want to see my local government constantly overshadowed by distrust and cynicism, by a debilitating lack of faith in its motives. These bills must be passed to rebuild confidence in our town halls and city halls. I commend these bills to the House.