




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 17 March 2020

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Local Government Elections

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (1.34 pm): I rise today to acknowledge those mayors and councillors who are ending their four-year term on 28 March this year. Without any fanfare, in the midst of floods, droughts, bushfires and whatever else Mother Nature or COVID-19 serves up, these hardworking people do their best to rise to the challenges in their local communities. On behalf of the LNP I would like to place on record our sincere thanks to all of the mayors and councillors who have chosen to retire at this election for their dedication to their communities. I wish those seeking re-election all the very best. In this regard, I also congratulate the mayors and councillors who have been elected unopposed. I know there is a very excited mayor at the Goondiwindi Regional Council—former member of this House, Lawrence Springborg.

An opposition member: The Borg is back!

Ms LEAHY: I am pleased to say that the Borg is back. Perhaps after the next redistribution he might be in my electorate too. There have been many reforms to transparency and integrity in local government, and perhaps this might go some way to explain the reluctance of people choosing to nominate for local government positions. The ECQ data has shown a significant drop in the number of nominations this year compared with 2016. There are about 200 fewer candidates putting themselves forward. The LGAQ also noted that they have seen more of their existing elected members choosing not to stand this time compared to historical averages. It has been suggested that, while agreeing there is a need to meet community expectations in relation to transparency and accountability, the pendulum may have swung a little bit too far and acted to curtail democracy by being a disincentive to stand and participate in community service. On a positive note, around 37 per cent of candidates nominating this year are women, representing a consistent and steady increase from previous terms.

For this election there has been no change to the voting system for local government. It is an optional preferential voting system and first past the post, thanks to the efforts of Queensland local governments that were supported by the LNP in the fight against the vote-rigging changes proposed by the Palaszczuk Labor government. Unfortunately, at this local government election there has been some confusion in relation to what constitutes a how-to-vote card for candidates. Candidates have reported frustration when they have presented to the returning officer to register their how-to-vote cards. I am pleased that the Electoral Commission has updated its fact sheet and provided templates indicating what a how-to-vote card is and what electoral material is. Hopefully, these templates will reduce the workload of the ECQ in relation to this matter.

The time for postal vote applications closed last night. This is much earlier than in previous elections. We know that the Electoral Commission's website failed yesterday as many people concerned about the coronavirus tried to apply for a postal vote. It was not working too well last week either as I was unable to lodge my application. The application closure two weeks prior to polling day is problematic at the best of times, let alone when we have concerns about COVID-19. People are concerned that they might be isolated in their homes or hospitals and would require a postal vote.

I have been disappointed by some of the candidates' behaviour in this local government election. There has been cyberbullying by the Labor opposition leader of female LNP councillors in the Brisbane City Council. Furthermore, it is unacceptable to see reports of candidates interfering with other candidates' signage. I have seen reports about mayoral candidates in Logan and allegations concerning the mayoral election in Maranoa. I suggest that all those involved leave other candidates' signage alone. Do not interfere with signage. This behaviour is unacceptable and voters will judge you accordingly. I do appeal to all volunteers at polling booths to ensure decorum and to keep their distance from those who are going to vote. COVID-19 is very serious, and I appeal to all volunteers to accept the advice and keep 1.5 metres away. These are unprecedented times, and I look forward to working with returning and future mayors and councillors towards better Queensland communities and a better future for Queensland.