Speech By

Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms LEAHY (Warrego—LNP) (11.38 am), continuing: I resume my contribution to the debate on the COVID-19 Emergency Response and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, which amends the Labor government laws that manipulated the local government voting system for Labor's own political advantage. The government is now on its third round of amendments, repeating its mistakes of the past when it did not listen. I also note the amendments made to the amendments of June. These amendments did not go through the committee process. In June, there were just 24 hours to scrutinise some 229 amendments over 100 pages and delve into the full implications of these rushed and flawed amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker Lui, before I continue, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment to the position and welcome you to the chair.

Now the Labor government is back fixing the mess it created. The LNP opposition warned the appointment of runners-up would not be reflective of the electorate's wishes. I said in this House in June—

Filling the vacancy of a mayoral position during the first 12 months after a quadrennial election with a runner-up is a significant departure from the existing legislation ... What if the departing mayor won with 80 per cent of the vote and the next two candidates had 11 per cent ...

We did see a situation where a departing mayor had 68 per cent of the vote and the next candidate had 30 per cent. I continued—

How could appointing a runner-up be a reflection of the electorate's wishes in those circumstances? They would be appointing somebody who won 11 per cent of the vote.

As we have seen in the case of Rockhampton, it was 30 per cent of the vote.

The LNP and I told this House that the path of Labor's vote manipulation was fraught with danger and we have been proven to be correct. The LGAQ warned at the time in their submission of concerns similar to those held by the LNP. However, duly warned, the government in their blinded political agenda forged on with another example of enacting legislation to hurt Labor's political opponents. These amendments are the result of those flawed changes.

As we said, under Labor's amendments communities have been denied the opportunity to nominate or to vote should a vacancy arise, and two have—in Rockhampton and Townsville. Margaret Strelow received 68 per cent of the first-preference vote. The only other candidate, Chris 'Pineapple' Hooper, received 31 per cent of the vote. In Townsville's Division 10 the successful candidate received 64.36 per cent of the first-preference vote, with Fran O'Callaghan the runner-up on 18 per cent. As usual, in a rush for political advantage at the October state election, the Labor Party passed the legislation for runners-up to be appointed to vacancies whilst dumping democracy and the voice of the people.

The former minister for local government, Stirling Hinchliffe, admitted to numerous media outlets, 'The government had initially changed the laws in a bid to discourage councillors from running in the October state election.'

Mr Krause: How does he stay in cabinet?

Ms LEAHY: I will take that interjection. How does he stay in cabinet with that track record? For the information of the House, I table one of these articles where he is quoted saying these very words.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Courier-Mail*, dated 11 November 2020, regarding the resignation of the Mayor of Rockhampton, Ms Margaret Strelow 329.

I have to ask the question: did the government change the law to discourage Margaret Strelow from contesting the state seat of Rockhampton? She had contested it before. Why is Labor so frightened of Margaret Strelow or was it because of Ms Strelow's support for the Adani mine loan the Premier controversially vetoed? Have these politically charged laws come from a bitter factional row within the Labor Party that goes all the way to the Premier who backed Ms Strelow in the bitter preselection battle for the seat of Rockhampton in 2017? Which other mayors and councillors are the Labor government so concerned about that they wanted to put up barriers to these people exercising their right—I might add, their prescribed human right under Labor's laws—to stand for election?

This is a clear manipulation of the local government voting system for Labor's own political advantage. It is, bluntly, another stuff-up of this government in the local government area. It is also an outrageous assault on democracy for Labor's advantage. The Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Labor government owe the people of Rockhampton and the people of division 10 in Townsville an apology—an apology for putting them through weeks of uncertainty for something that could have been avoided.

Further, the minister owes the existing councillors of the Rockhampton Regional Council an apology for what they are enduring. These councillors do not feel well supported by this Labor government, and I hope the minister takes the time to personally visit the council and apologise. It will be of interest to the House to learn that the current Rockhampton councillors are being harassed by members of Extinction Rebellion, there are protests outside the town hall and there are other matters which have been referred to the police. That is what happens when Labor stuffs it up. It is all because this Labor government has made up laws and they now have to come back into this House to rescind them urgently.

On the other side of the House we have the member for Rockhampton who said in the *Courier-Mail* that Margaret Strelow was having a childish temper tantrum or a stunt designed to cause a completely unnecessary by-election. I ask the member for Rockhampton: does he favour the runner-up, an Extinction Rebellion activist and self-described ratbag over the people of Rockhampton having their say in a by-election? Does the member for Rockhampton believe ratepayers should not have a say in who they fund through their ratepayer funds for the position of mayor for the next 3½ years? I say to the member for Rockhampton: will you now support the by-election that you said was not necessary? Will the member now support ratepayers, his constituents, having a say in who their mayor is for the next 3½ years? Will the member stand by his comments in the media?

This legislation has other unintended consequences which have been detrimental to all mayors in the state. Effectively, the legislation has placed a target on every sitting mayor. Concerns have been expressed to me that political and serial complainants have tried to use this legislation to force mayors into submission via continual complaints so that they feel compelled to resign. This would then enable the runner-up who might be more politically aligned to the complainants to then take on the position of mayor as a runner-up. It has been expressed to me on a number of occasions by mayors that they feel seriously targeted by this legislation.

This Labor government has a sorry history when it comes to rigging the local government voting system. Remember Belcarra stage 2—there was Labor's vote rorting approach to compulsory preferential voting which caused a major stir right across Queensland's councils. So much was the fallout that in fact Labor had to fall on its sword and ditch the CPV proposal.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Pause the clock. Member, can I ask you to come back to the long title of the bill.

Ms LEAHY: Now the government are on their third round of amendments to address their further attempts to corruptly manipulate the local government voting system.

Government members interjected.

Ms LEAHY: They do not like it. They are their own actions and they do not like it.

Whilst elections are costly they are necessary to ensure that communities have their say. Maybe that has been a bit lost on some members opposite. It is the right thing to do for the community to repeal the runner-up provisions which the LNP supports. However, if the Labor government were not so rabid with their political agenda this would never have happened.