




Speech By  
**Charis Mullen**

**MEMBER FOR JORDAN**

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**ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION (ACCOUNTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND OTHER MATTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (12.24 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2019. Quite rightly, the focus of our Palaszczuk government is on supporting our communities to recover from COVID-19 through the release of our comprehensive economic recovery plan, Unite and Recover for Queensland Jobs. At the same time, it is during these moments of crisis, these moments of upheaval and change, that we need to protect our very system of government so that it remains inclusive, accountable and democratic. More than ever, Queenslanders must be able to have confidence in our electoral system as a key feature of our democracy.

The bill before us contains some fundamental reforms that enhance integrity and public accountability for our state electoral processes. I wish to congratulate the Attorney-General, the department and her team for the incredible amount of work that has been undertaken on this legislation. I know this is something the Attorney-General feels very strongly about. In fact she made a very good point in her introductory speech on this bill which bears repeating. She said—

The actual and perceived integrity of this system is significantly enhanced by no single person or entity being able to improperly influence those involved in electoral campaigning for state elections whether they be political parties, MPs, candidates or others engaged in campaigning to influence voting.

There is a growing move across many jurisdictions in Australia to more closely regulate election financing and to address growing concerns about the escalating campaign arms race and the potential undue influence of private funds in the electoral system. In fact there are caps on political donations in New South Wales and Victoria, whilst New South Wales, South Australia, the ACT and the Northern Territory have all implemented caps on electoral expenditure.

The legislation before us today includes: capping political donations; capping electoral expenditure; requiring political parties, candidates and third parties to maintain dedicated state campaign accounts, which will support the integrity of and compliance with the donations and expenditure caps; and increased public funding to decrease reliance on public donations. With the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has rightly deferred the donation caps and election funding to 2022.

The member for Toowoomba North and the LNP simply cannot deal with reasonable donation caps. I was reminded of an opinion piece written in the *Courier-Mail* back in 2014. Speaking about the Newman government's electoral laws at the time, the article said—

After coming to power on a promise of improving accountability, the Government has wiped out every improvement they've achieved with these indulgent changes. The identity of most donors will be hidden. A veil has been drawn down over cheques being exchanged in the private rooms of plush restaurants. It's a retrograde step ...

Whilst the member for Burnett was very quick to talk about the supposed \$2.2 million of union funds yesterday, I note he did not bother to mention the \$83.6 million that Clive Palmer spent in the last federal election that we know helped get their mate, Scott Morrison, elected.

Our government has also listened to the implications of what the new funding and expenditure requirements will be for small third parties, including charities and not-for-profit organisations, and has made necessary adjustments to the bill. As the Queensland Human Rights Commission submitted, charitable organisations and other groups that rely on donations would be disproportionately impacted as they have limited resources to finance any electoral expenditure. This is in contrast to organisations that have funding streams, such as profit-making entities or organisations with membership dues, and that have greater flexibility in how they organise their finances. A similar recommendation was made by the parliamentary committee in its report born from a number of the submissions received.

The Queensland Council of Social Service summed up the bill's aims in their submission to the parliamentary committee. As they said—

Electoral transparency, raising the level of political discussion and supporting a variety of voices to be heard are critical steps in restoring faith in democracy and increasing civic participation in elections and in communities.

Another area of reform which this bill relates to is election signage and it is a welcome reform based on the discussions with those in my community. When you talk about an arms race, it can truly be seen on polling booths—whether at pre-poll or on election day—and I am not quite sure how it aids democracy. The amendments to the bill—which would see a display of up to six signs in each designated area, which can be a combination of small and large signs—will see a much more sane approach to election signage. As I indicated, it will be welcomed by the community.

Our government is also taking additional precautions in relation to COVID-19 in the upcoming state election in October. It will allow the government to support the work of the Electoral Commission of Queensland in terms of electoral visitor arrangements, postal vote requirements, arrangements for the distribution of and display of election material and the scrutineering process. Our government will support voters to ensure they have every capacity to exercise their democratic right to vote when the time comes. This is something we need to protect. During the recent local government elections, it was really concerning to see many of those opposite actively run a campaign to frighten voters and discourage them from attending pre-poll and polling booths to vote. This is despite assurances from the ECQ that plans were in place and it was perfectly safe for voters to attend a polling booth.

Of course, as we saw, there were no mass outbreaks of COVID-19 from pre-poll voting or from the local government election day. What the LNP did, including the mayor of Brisbane may I add, was dangerous and dishonest, and it showed how quickly and willing the LNP were to stomp on our community's democratic right to vote. We all still remember the introduction of voter ID at the 2015 elections and, as the Human Rights Law Centre said at the time, the votes of tens of thousands of vulnerable people were threatened.

Finally, I am pleased to see that this bill includes provisions of the government response to the Operation Yabber report. This was a CCC report into the Gold Coast city council and specifically some of the activities of the Gold Coast mayor, a number of which have now been referred to the Office of the Independent Assessor. Once again, we heard from the member for Mermaid Beach, Mayor Tate's No. 1 cheerleader in this House—he just needs the pompoms—that there is nothing to see here. Actually there was something to see if he had read the report. There was very concerning evidence of activity which has now led to provisions in the bill whereby a mayor of a local government is prohibited from giving directions to the CEO about employment matters for local government employees or discipline of councillor advisers that may cause the CEO to breach their responsibilities under the Local Government Act or another law.

The Palaszczuk government has a strong record of enhancing electoral integrity, transparency and accountability in Queensland. This bill aims to further strengthen public confidence in both our electoral system and our local government system as key democratic institutions. I commend the bill to the House.