




Speech By
Linus Power

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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**MINISTERIAL AND OTHER OFFICE HOLDER STAFF AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (5.10 pm): I appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition wanted to speak on other issues that are not part of the bill, but I want to talk about the committee members and recognise one of the most able deputy chairs, Ray Stevens, the member for Mermaid Beach.

Ms Richards: Mayor of the Albert shire.

Mr POWER: Yes, mayor of the Albert shire. I also recognise the member for Pine Rivers, who has gone on to even greater things; the member for Bonney, who was very passionate about this deliberation, and I believe it was his first; the member for Ninderry, who has gone on to other places; and the member for Redlands. The ministerial staff and electoral staff who serve us do good work in trying circumstances. In this COVID period, they dealt with a lot of people who were anxious, unhappy and sometimes frustrated and angry about the rules that were put in place. A lot of them would join with the opposition in wanting a lot of Victorians to come up, and we had to deal with that process and say to them that those things were obviously not good for the state of Queensland. We never convinced the LNP about that, but we did manage to convince a lot of our constituents.

Our staff deeply care about the constituents who come to them. I want to recognise some of my staff who have since retired, Cheryl Bellert and Hazel Hubbard. They were wonderful servants for the people of Queensland and the constituents they served. They often pushed me to make the extra effort on someone's behalf because they were passionate about the issue. They also knew they had a responsibility to be trusted about the information they received and the situations they were in. That is what makes this an evolution of the process of this parliament. It is giving powers to the Clerk in order to ensure that that trust is fulfilled. In that way it builds on the tradition of integrity that we have continued to see evolve, especially since 1989.

The committee was asked to inquire into the bill and report back by 5 July. We asked for written submissions from the public and we identified the stakeholders and subscribers. Because this was a commonsense evolution of the integrity of the parliament, we did not actually receive any submissions but we went through the process of ensuring people could make submissions. We requested written advice from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet on the bill and they gave us quite a comprehensive briefing which is on the committee's website.

The primary objective of the bill is to provide the director-general of the department and the Clerk of the Parliament with explicit power to conduct criminal history checks to assess the suitability of a person to be engaged in a ministerial office. We immediately put in place a mechanism to allow that. Although those temporary measures have not been challenged in any way and were active and working, ensuring we did have those high standards of integrity over the past couple of years, this bill explicitly does that—so it is still relevant and worthwhile because it ensures that continuing involvement of integrity. There was also a small adjustment to the parliamentary precinct that helped facilitate the Queen's Wharf development.

The government has explained that they undertook consultation with the Police Service, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General and the Clerk in relation to this bill. The committee made only two recommendations. The first was that the bill be passed and there was also a small drafting error. I wish to recognise here the good quality of our secretariat staff. The member for Mermaid Beach and I were about to point out that drafting error, but they got to it first so I commend them for that.

When the Clerk or the Speaker proposes to appoint or engage a person in their relevant duties, the Clerk may ask for written consent to obtain their criminal history. That is the process now for everyone. This applies even if the person is an office holder or employee of the Parliamentary Service when the Clerk proposes to engage them in a new role. They can ask for a variety of information—if a person was convicted, if there was a prosecution and if there was an appeal against prosecution.

It is also important, as the Attorney-General mentioned, that there be information safeguards. Like everyone in the Public Service, we have to ensure there are reasonable safeguards for our employees. The bill provides that information given to the Police Commissioner by the director-general or the Clerk in making a request for a person's criminal history must not be accessed, disclosed or used for any purpose, other than a purpose relating to assessing the person's suitability to be a staff member. Again, that is an evolution about how professional our Police Service is about the information it deals with.

Importantly, there are penalties. There are penalties about confidentiality, as I mentioned, which can be up to 100 penalty units. At the time of the publication of our report, that was \$12,615. There are also penalties for any person who makes false or misleading statements to the director-general or Clerk. If someone attempted to obscure or hide their identity so that information would not be revealed, there is a penalty which obviously ensures there is integrity in the process.

Although this is a relatively simple bill, I will not go on with an attempt to talk about staff members on the opposition side who faced ethics inquiries or anything like that and what should be done to their employment because that is not central to the bill. The bill is simply about the process of giving the Clerk the powers to do criminal history checks. I think that is a steady and worthwhile evolution of our integrity process in this place.