




Speech By
Hon. Mark Bailey

MEMBER FOR MILLER

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2020

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

 **Hon. MC BAILEY** (Miller—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (4.36 pm): I rise to support the legislation before the House. Public confidence in the political integrity of the system and accountability certainly took a hit during the years of 2012 to 2015 under then premier Campbell Newman. This government has been restoring that accountability and transparency since being elected in 2015. We were responsible for the restoration of \$1,000 thresholds. We remember that it was the Newman government that raised the threshold for the reporting of political donations to \$12,400, to their absolute shame. We rectified that in the first year of our first term. We brought in real-time political donations, which was opposed by the LNP. We banned property developer donations, which was again opposed and voted against by the LNP. This bill is about taking big money out of politics.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BAILEY: We can see that they are provoked. When you point out their record of opposing integrity, opposing transparency and opposing accountability—which they are doing again today—they do not like it. However, they are going to get a lot more of it.

This bill is about taking the big money out of politics. It about ensuring that those with the most money to throw around cannot speak with the loudest voice. The people's voice should not be drowned out by the loudest or the richest voices in our community. That is not democracy. Introducing donation caps and expenditure caps will remove undue influence from politics and we will see a much more level playing field, which is what our democracy is about. These measures will ensure greater integrity in our democratic system. It is only the Labor Party that brings such reforms to this parliament and gets things done. The legislation will give Queenslanders more confidence that those making the decisions for this state are motivated by the interests of the many, not the narrow agendas of the few.

These changes will also make Queensland a leader when it comes to openness and transparency in our electoral system. They will stop the arms race on electoral expenditure. They will remove the incentive for cash for access. By applying expenditure caps to candidates, political parties and third parties for an election and by significantly reducing donation caps, these changes provide a level playing field for those who want to participate in our democratic system.

The LNP have been predictably outspoken about our government's moves towards greater accountability and transparency. They have clearly learnt nothing at all, nor have they changed their tune since they increased that threshold to \$12,400 which was corrected by this government, and proudly so. This was the same LNP that fought in the courts to keep secret \$100,000 in political donations and keep it off the official register, the party that nobbled the parliamentary CCC under Campbell Newman as premier and were arguing in the courts in only September of last year, less than a year ago, that the political threshold for reporting of donations should be \$13,500. It is just extraordinary. They do not change their tune. The LNP prefer to work in the shadows, not in the sunlight. That is who the LNP are. They are consistent on that—

Mr Crandon interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Stewart): Order! Pause the clock. Member for Coomera, you will direct your comments through the chair. If you do not, you will be warned under the standing orders.

Mr BAILEY: Those opposite found themselves in furious disagreement with the recommendation of the CCC that property developer donations be banned and they voted against those reforms. The former head of their party went all the way to the High Court to challenge the CCC endorsed ban. The member for Kawana's undemocratic demand that union donations be banned is in direct conflict with the advice of Mr MacSporran that there is no evidence to support such a ban.

In contrast to those opposite, where we have a difference of opinion with our independent statutory bodies, we set out our reasoning in a respectful, evidence based way. It is not unusual or improper for a government or for individual members to have a difference of opinion with independent statutory bodies on public policy measures. That is the difference between this side of the House and those opposite. That is why the member for Kawana should be the last MP to be lecturing this government, or anybody else for that matter, on issues of integrity.

The Palaszczuk Labor government has a proud history of integrity reform. Since 2015 our government has delivered reduced thresholds down to \$1,000. As I outlined earlier, we laid the groundwork for the real-time disclosure scheme to require disclosure within 24 hours in the last seven days of a campaign when there is the most level of interest in the political system. Those were groundbreaking reforms which enhance our democracy.

We restored the independence and we increased the funding for the Crime and Corruption Commission. We created greater transparency requiring that the true source of the donor be identified, not hiding behind intermediaries. We introduced a ban on donations from property developers. We also introduced reforms into local government to remove undue influence.

I will address some of the other measures in terms of the conduct of the actual election as well. What we saw earlier this year was an extraordinary situation where we were confronted with a global pandemic for the first time in a century which coincided with the local government elections. There was a level of understandable concern in our community about the juncture of those two things together. We and the Electoral Commission took health advice about the conduct of that election. The health advice was that it could continue but with some very strict and severe measures. They were severe: it was a limitation of certain democratic freedoms, but it was there to protect the health of Queenslanders.

I know, and I think every member in this place knows, there was understandable concern in the community as to whether people would be at a health risk if they voted. Given the confluence of events, that was understandable. But we know the measures were effective because when we looked at the incubation after the local government election period, we saw reductions in the number of positive cases in Queensland. It was effective. I thank the Chief Health Officer, those who conducted the elections and the Attorney-General who worked very hard together on those measures in an unprecedented situation with a lot of information to process and to make very important decisions very quickly. The truth is they were successful and we have to acknowledge that.

This bill allows for a range of provisions that allow for the state election with a range of possibilities depending on what happens on the health front. In a number of other places we are seeing second waves occur, and that is something that we are very conscious of as a state government. We have to prepare for any eventuality leading into the state election. That is what this bill does. I, like every member of this House, hope that we are in a continuing, very strong health position by the time we get to the state election, but we have to have other mechanisms at hand if we need them.

I certainly support the increased voting hours. Those provisions will take into account the health situation and allow for flexibility if circumstances change. We know with this pandemic that they can change quickly. South Korea, Singapore and Iran, which was one of the earliest countries affected, are all experiencing big outbreaks and second waves. This virus has incredible potency, so we have to be prepared. This bill is appropriate as it gives us the mechanisms that we need to ensure that, whatever happens—and let us all hope that we continue on the same path that we are now as one of the best performing states in the nation per capita on the health front—we are in a good position.

I certainly support those parts of the bill that are very important, but I do also support the accountability measures in terms of this electoral bill. This government has a proud record of reform in this regard, a consistent record from the year we were elected, and we will continue to maintain that. It is only this side of the House that is sincere and consistent about transparency and accountability. I commend the bill to the House.