




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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**ELECTORAL LEGISLATION (POLITICAL DONATIONS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.23 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Electoral Legislation (Political Donations) Amendment Bill 2018. Public trust in state, federal and local Australian governments and our major institutions has just about collapsed in recent years. This is particularly the case amongst our young people, workers, small owners and farmers.

The Centre for Governance and Public Policy at Griffith University published a report earlier this year which contained shocking data on this issue from the Australian Constitutional Values Survey. According to the most recent survey results in 2018, trust in state and federal governments has plummeted from 82 per cent to 46 per cent in the last decade. That is an astounding drop by any measure. The survey also revealed that 56 per cent of respondents, equating to over 10.2 million Australians, say they have had personal knowledge or experience of political favouritism where undue influence was used, resulting in political decisions that have benefitted wealthy and powerful interests. Overall, an incredible 85 per cent of respondents stated that they believed many politicians in parliament today are corrupt.

When the public's view of government has sunk this low, the matter can no longer be viewed as a party political issue but rather a genuine breakdown in people's trust and confidence in the integrity of the political process itself. Each and every one of us in this parliament today has one overriding and fundamental responsibility, and that is to respond to community concerns and to always operate in the public's interest. It is therefore up to everyone involved in government to consider practical and legislative ways that we can help rebuild people's trust in their governments and institutions. The goal should be not just greater political equality but also to end the capture of governments by powerful economic interests and to create space for economic policies that will further the interests of the majority of citizens and not just the wealthy few.

It is unacceptable for any government to be perceived as an instrument or a tool of big business. Large corporations, by their very nature, are simply concerned with one thing—profit maximisation. Their primary focus is industry specific and their overriding goal at all times is how to further protect or expand their market advantage. Corporations do not act or plan in the public interest. That is the role of the government. It is a role that sometimes needs to be actively safeguarded.

In recent years, mining industries have come to exercise an undue influence on government and institutions in this state. This has led to successful moves by them to oppose or circumvent workplace health and safety laws, environmental regulations and legal frameworks. Their overriding agenda is to obtain and defend valuable land lease, even if it means pressuring governments to extinguish native title or environmental controls, such as vegetation management laws, that other industries are forced to abide by. All of this has led to deep resentment and anger amongst the wider community.

When considering this bill I went to the AEC's website. There is a yearly register of political donations made to all political parties in this state. Almost the first thing that struck me was how many big corporate donors were giving money to both Labor and the LNP. In fact, of the 30 donors listed as having made donations to the Labor Party in Queensland, over half—16 out of 30—had also made

donations to the LNP. This is of huge concern to me. It clearly shows that these donors are not acting out of genuine feeling or ideological or philosophical support for one side or the other. Instead, they are only concerned about preserving their influence over the government, whether Labor or LNP.

This would explain why most of the time it seems that there are no real areas of difference between the two parties. When it comes to economic policy or policies that protect favoured interest groups, they are invariably both on the same page. It is also why so much legislation is being raced through parliament without debate or mandate half of the time. If both parties act in a bipartisan manner, that effectively removes the democratic scrutiny of that legislation. We see that with some of the bills that are rushed through this place.

The bill will hopefully go some way towards eliminating the perception and reality that rich donors are able to buy access or influence in politics. To those arguing that this is a free speech issue my response would be that money is not speech. Governments have the right and the duty to regulate electoral donations in order to preserve free and fair elections where every citizen's vote counts.

Corporations are also not people. They therefore have no constitutional right to finance elections, overrule democratic legislation or evade state controls and regulations. We need to separate corporate power and money from government decision-making in order to go some way to restoring people's faith in the independence and integrity of government. If we do nothing then the revolving door between industry and government could replace democracy with plutocracy before long.