



Speech By  
**Trevor Watts**


**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Record of Proceedings, 26 November 2020

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
BILL**

**Declared Urgent**

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.19 pm): There are two elements with this urgency motion. We are looking at a piece of legislation that is very serious with regard to our freedoms and other things that people enjoy in Queensland, and that should not be conflated with what is going on in the local government area. As people are aware, it was only a few short months ago that the local government legislation was changed. In fact, if we had not had an election, there would be no ability to correct this because we would not be able to have the same question heard in the same parliament. The consequence of rushing through legislation and not going through a committee process—not allowing our democracy to work appropriately—is of great concern to me and should be of great concern to all Queenslanders.

This government has form with manipulating our democracy to its desired political outcomes, but more importantly than that this piece of proposed legislation has a retrospective clause in it. Therefore, something that was legal changes and this parliament is reaching backwards in time to try to change the outcome of a political process that was put in place by this government because that political process did not receive the appropriate scrutiny and did not receive the appropriate time and consideration of the members of this place. The simple facts are that if the government is going to have both retrospective legislation and legislation that is going to affect how people are governed in the state of Queensland it is incredibly dangerous for that legislation to not receive full scrutiny. If at the very least we cannot get full scrutiny, then this bill should not be guillotined, and we know that the guillotine was dropped on many bills in the last parliament to stop scrutiny and we have seen the mistakes that have come from that.

I am not suggesting at all that what was put forward does not need fixing. It was a mess and many people said that at the time. The day after that change was made my local newspaper said that it would be a perverse outcome in a town like Toowoomba. We could have had a situation, if something had happened to our mayor, whom nearly 80 per cent of the people voted for, where a person with 20 per cent of the vote could have ended up as the mayor. It was a strange and peculiar bill, but it was passed by the government of the day.

Part of the reason that went the way it did is that the ability of this House to scrutinise the legislation was curtailed. Here we are again with a patch on a patch trying to change how our democracy functions without actually letting our democracy function. It is of great concern that there are some elements, as I heard it, in the bill that might not apply the same in all areas. That needs scrutiny. That needs to be looked at. People should have the right and opportunity to voice their opinion about what the government is proposing. That is why we have the committee structure.

The government controls the committees so it controls the outcome of committee reports. The government controls the numbers in the parliament. There is no need to be afraid of the scrutiny. The difficulty we have is that we are reaching back in time with retrospective legislation to change the way our democracy functions in Queensland—something which was changed by this government just a few short months ago—that has led to this perverse outcome.

I am deeply concerned that this parliament is becoming the plaything of the Palaszczuk government and that the democracy of Queensland is being abused on a regular basis through guillotines, retrospectivity, legislation being passed without going to committee and urgency motions because it is inconvenient for the government to come into this place and debate legislation and have committee scrutiny. Looking back through history, there was a not dissimilar parliament. Oliver Cromwell abolished that parliament. The parliament would not do what the dictator wanted, so he just got rid of it. We are starting to head in that direction. We—

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr WATTS:** No. Members may well suggest we are not, but the simple facts are when bills are guillotined, when retrospective legislation comes in and when the government will not allow democracy to function, that is exactly where we are heading. We are heading to a point where the people's voice is not heard in this parliament, in its committees or any functions of this parliament. Members opposite might not like that, but that is the simple fact of what is going on here.

This bill should not be declared urgent. It should go through the committee process and the people of Queensland, including many people from the communities concerned, should have their voices heard. It should be scrutinised appropriately. It should be debated well and truly in this place because it is at the cornerstone of the functioning of Queensland. Democracy should be respected by everybody, and that includes all of the members of this House and it includes the minister who is proposing this bill. Mr Deputy Speaker Kelly, I put it to you that this motion should not be upheld because this legislation should not be considered urgent because it is an attack on our democracy, it is an attack on our political process in this place and it should not be tolerated by the people of Queensland. I hope the fourth estate brings it home to the people of Queensland so the government understands that this parliament is not a plaything of the Palaszczuk government.