



Speech By  
**Andrew Powell**


**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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## **INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

### **PUBLIC SECTOR BILL**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (6.05 pm): I, too, rise to address the cognated Public Sector Bill 2022 and Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Whilst the Speaker reminded me this morning that there is no such thing as a rhetorical question in this House, I think the member for Bulimba put one: ‘What is the opposite of integrity?’ That is Labor. The last eight years has demonstrated that if you want to know what the opposite of integrity is, it is actually the Labor Party, spelt A-L-P. If you want to know how they traded in an integrity commissioner, that has been well and truly aired in the public. If you want to know how they have associated themselves with lobbyists, we just have to say the word ‘Anacta’. It goes on and on.

Let me start with the fact that this is a cognate debate. This is how those opposite want to run from scrutiny and transparency. They cannot accept that people on this side of the House, the crossbenchers—even their own, for that matter—would want to speak for 10 minutes not only on the Public Sector Bill but also on the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. But, no, we cannot have that. We cannot have the members of the LNP opposition spending 10 minutes talking about integrity; we need to smash them together so they only get half that time. If those opposite had any shred of integrity left—and we have just established that they do not—they would have left these bills as separate bills so that we could have debated each separately and had our allocated time slot for each.

I wish to start with the Public Sector Bill. The public needs to understand this is about implementing only one aspect of the Coaldrake review. This is actually about implementing the Bridgman review, which was undertaken back in May 2019. That is how quickly those opposite move to legislate reform within the Public Service. It has taken them 3½ years to bring this forward. If we look at what it is basically achieving, it is putting into legislation that our Public Service here in Queensland will be fair, that it will be responsive, and that it will be a leader in public administration. As a former public servant, I am staggered that we need to legislate that.

I was doing a little research in preparation for this speech. I worked out, as a public servant for 12 years at the Commonwealth and state level, I had the privilege of serving under eight different ministers, and six of those were Labor. I started in the Commonwealth Department of Defence under the then Labor senator Robert Ray before Ian McLachlan and John Moore from the coalition took over that role. When moving back to Queensland, my first job was in Terry Mackenroth’s department of communication and information, local government, planning and sport—DOCILGPS, a great department name and great acronym—before Terry retired. The then premier, Peter Beattie, took over the division that I worked for, the community engagement division, funnily enough running ministerial regional community forums, which I see have made a comeback under the current government, and therefore briefing a range of ministers across all portfolios as they went far and wide around the state.

In 2004 I shifted to the department of child safety and served under Mike Reynolds, Desley Boyle and Margaret Keech. It is fair to say that not every single one of those ministers inspired me. It is fair to say that some were far more focused, had a better agenda and had a better rapport with the Public Service than others. I will leave honourable members to work out which ones were which. I can tell honourable members that at every stage my intent, as I believe is the intent of every genuine public servant, was to provide frank and fearless advice to the government of the day regardless of the colour of their politics.

What really separated a good minister from the others is they had an agenda. I mentioned Terry Mackenroth. I would love to see the calibre of Terry Mackenroth in those opposite. There is no-one on the other side who can come close to him. Ministers I enjoyed working under were fair. Ministers I enjoyed working under were responsive. In fact, the thing that gave me the irrits the most was when we were told we needed to prepare an urgent brief for the minister and we had 24 hours to prepare it and then we waited six months for the minister to come back with a response. That was not responsive. That was inefficient.

Even serving under the likes of Terry Mackenroth not once did I fear a minister I worked for or the ministerial staff they employed—not once—because the tone was set at the top, as Peter Coaldrake said. That tone was essential. Perhaps there was one minister I had to work with whom I feared, but it was not for my personal safety. It was because I usually had to reach for a dictionary to understand some of the expletives he used. That minister was Robert Schwarten when I was briefing him in preparation for ministerial regional community forums. Not once did I fear and not once was I required to sanitise a document.

At the end of the day that is what this legislation is about. Those opposite have spent eight years creating a culture set by the tone at the top that has created fear and mistrust within the Public Service. As we have heard in the Coaldrake review, that has led to the sanitising of reports to please ministers. That is unacceptable.

I also had the opportunity of then being a minister, albeit for three years. I had the privilege of serving with some fantastic senior public servants, and I want to mention Andrew Chesterman in particular, the former director-general of the then department of environment and heritage protection with whom I served. He is a brilliant man who respected all of his staff and ensured the culture was set from the top. I myself endeavoured to ensure that, even though the public servants did not necessarily like some of what we were implementing as a government, they were treated with respect and their frank and fearless advice was taken on board and responded to in a timely fashion.

Let me tell this story. I have since been approached by someone who described themselves as a green-leaning voting member of the then department of environment and heritage protection. Their words to me were, 'I may have hated your agenda as a minister, but at least you had one.' Those opposite have created such an environment that there is no agenda; there is fear. There is no fairness, there is no responsiveness and they are not creating leaders in public administration. In fact, they are creating the opposite, which is why they have to come in here to legislate today.

That brings me to the Coaldrake review. The Public Sector Bill addresses only one aspect, and that is strengthening the independence of certain core integrity bodies and that includes the Electoral Commission of Queensland. We have heard others comment on the comments made by the commissioner and how we need to ensure that independence, and I note the amendments that are coming forward.

Then if we switch to the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, we know that this still only briefly touches on the Coaldrake review. That Coaldrake review had to shine the light on the practices that I referred to—shine the light on the fact that the Public Service have lost faith in this government; a Public Service, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, that is leaking because they are fed up and frustrated with a government that has no agenda and that allows their ministerial staff to impose their will and their demands on how they operate. That is not acceptable. Yes, there are elements in this bill which will improve that. It will enshrine the independence of positions like the Auditor-General, the Integrity Commissioner and the Ombudsman, but do we need to wait another 3½ years, as we have for the outcomes of the Bridgman review, before the full recommendations of the Coaldrake review are implemented?

Let's remember why that review was necessary. It was due to the way those opposite in particular treated the role of the Integrity Commissioner. I have never seen anything like it—not in 12 years as a public servant or in more than 13 years as a member of this chamber. That behaviour of those opposite and those they have surrounded themselves with was disgusting and abhorrent. It is no wonder the Public Service are looking for better alternatives.

**Mr Janetzki:** They want leadership.

**Mr POWELL:** I take that interjection from the member for Toowoomba South: they are looking for leadership. It is clear that no-one opposite is capable of delivering that, even with these legislative changes.

I say to the members of the Public Service, to those I have worked with previously, to those I have had the privilege of leading as a minister: if those opposite are not listening, we are. We always will. We will ensure that they have a government that is fair, responsive and allows them to be leaders in public administration and ultimately gives them an agenda that fills their days, allowing them to give frank and fearless advice to the government of the day.