




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR JORDAN

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mrs MULLEN** (Jordan—ALP) (7.12 pm): I am pleased to contribute to the cognate debate on the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and the Public Sector Bill 2022. The Integrity and Other Legislation Bill 2022 sets out the first tranche of legislation in response to two important reviews—the Coaldrake and Yearbury reviews. I welcome the strengthening and enhancing of the independence of the Queensland Auditor-General, the Queensland Audit Office and the Queensland Integrity Commissioner.

The Queensland Audit Office has a vision for better public services for Queenslanders with a purpose to provide valued, independent assurance and insights. I believe that the Audit Office, through its reporting, does provide us as members of parliament with a deeper understanding of issues facing public sector performance and financial reporting and in holding entities to account. The Coaldrake report made some specific recommendations about the Auditor-General and the Queensland Audit Office which are being reflected in this bill.

The bill also makes changes to the Integrity Act 2009 to enhance the independence and functions of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner, and again these changes have been welcomed. What those opposite did not welcome, of course, was the CCC's report of 4 July 2022 into some very serious allegations made by the LNP in relation to the former integrity commissioner's office. They ran a very public, a very long and a very misleading campaign, aided by elements of the media—some of whom may no longer be in the employ of said media—with claims of a raid on the former integrity commissioner's office, the seizure of a laptop and the improper disclosure of information. Those opposite did not welcome that the CCC found no evidence of improper disclosure, they did not welcome that the proven circumstances in which the laptop was retrieved from the then integrity commissioner's office were entirely ordinary and they certainly did not welcome the finding that there was no evidence to suggest that those circumstances led to any improper access of confidential information from the office of the then integrity commissioner.

There was no raid, no laptop seized and no information disclosed or removed. 'What was on the laptop?', they kept screaming, without any evidence of the claims they were making. It was dishonest, it was irresponsible and I believe it reflects the fact that they will say and do anything, even if it is not true, and continue to do this even today. It speaks to their lack of integrity, lack of honesty and even their lack of capacity to recognise when they made a mistake and apologise to those they accused of misdeeds.

I would like to turn now to the Public Sector Bill 2022. A modern, agile and impartial Public Service is absolutely critical to ensuring a strong, growing and resilient Queensland. The bill before us sets out to provide substantial and far-reaching reforms, including the development of a new act for the public sector in Queensland. The Public Sector Bill 2022 discharges the primary recommendation of the Bridgman review for a new public sector act with broad application to the public sector. This will include

the core Public Service as well as statutory bodies and other entities not currently captured by the Public Service Act 2008. This will ensure consistent application of public sector employment arrangements, including conversion mechanisms to apply. The bill has also been informed by further and important reviews—the Yearbury report and Professor Coaldrake’s independent review of Queensland’s public sector integrity framework.

We also recognise that COVID-19, a global pandemic, has provided one of the biggest stress tests to the Queensland Public Service, possibly in its lifetime. We saw the need for agility and flexibility to respond, including public servants taking on new roles to support the pandemic response. We saw the need for increased mobility of the public sector workforce to react quickly and effectively to the threat we faced as a state.

The bill also strengthens our government’s ongoing commitment to maximising employment security by clearly specifying that employment is on a permanent basis unless an act enables an alternative basis of employment. I am particularly pleased to see these provisions because I know that public sector security is something those opposite know nothing about. Some 14,000 public servants were sacked during their mercifully short reign, but damage was done.

I know this at a personal level because I was one of those public servants who was sacked by the Newman government, as was my husband, a TAFE lecturer. Those opposite make all attempts to skim over their reign of terror, but I believe they still do not seem to understand or appreciate the impact on the public servants and their job security. I want to reflect on the reforms in the bill around employment security which, as the Bridgman review noted, is a crucial feature of the Westminster system of government. We recognise that public servants who are secure in their role are better placed to be more innovative and able to provide full and frank advice to the government of the day.

In 2012 I was employed, through a merit-based approach, in a role in TransLink. It was a role I really enjoyed and which I believed I was doing very well. In 2013, at a whole of TransLink meeting—so almost 400 employees—the CEO at the time advised that, following a meeting with the then LNP minister for transport, he was advised that TransLink would need to shed one in four staff; that is, a quarter of the workforce was to be dismissed.

What ensued was appalling—months of limited information, not knowing who would lose their jobs, people trying to argue their value to the organisation to anyone who would listen and ultimately what can only be described as a form of Hunger Games; public servants believing and arguing they deserved to be there more than their colleagues. How much frank and fearless advice was provided during this time? Who would have been brave enough to speak up with the sword of Damocles looming over them? I was interested in the comments of the Leader of Opposition in his contribution that politics played no part in their decision-making, citing the current mayor of Ipswich and the member for Hervey Bay.

I was formally advised that my role had been cut and I was being dismissed. What I was also advised privately by senior public servants was that I was on a specific list of public servants who were targeted for dismissal for their known political affiliations. The irony is that another appointment at the time—the then director-general of the Department of Transport and Main Roads—also clearly had political affiliations. Whilst he too was dismissed, though in disgrace—the member for Mudgeeraba would remember that—it speaks to the dangerous political manipulation of the Public Service.

I am also pleased that the bill strengthens the stability of government and Public Service performance by appointing chief executives on fixed term five-year contracts unaligned to the electoral cycle.

Mr Mander interjected.

Mrs MULLEN: I clearly hit a raw nerve there! The bill provides that the term of a chief executive’s appointment is five years unless the person has requested a shorter period. Five-year fixed-term contracts are consistent with Westminster government principles, ensuring permanent leadership that is consequently better placed to give full and frank advice to government. This was an important recommendation by the Coaldrake review. I am pleased to see that our government supported the recommendation and it is confirmed in the bill today. The bill also recognises that chief executives play an important role in ensuring effective public sector governance and creates a range of duties and functions directed towards this.

Mr Watts: An upper house is Westminster too, to keep the government accountable. Are you bringing that back?

Mrs MULLEN: I would like to specifically refer to measures of inclusiveness and respect, member for Toowoomba North. It has been heartening to see the Albanese government treat the Kate Jenkins’s *Respect@work* report with actual respect, as opposed to the previous Morrison LNP government, which frankly showed nothing but disdain for the findings and recommendations of this important work.

Only yesterday we saw the passage of the Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Bill through the federal parliament. As the Prime Minister made very clear, sexual harassment is not inevitable; it is preventable. This historic Respect@Work legislation significantly progresses gender equality by ensuring women are able to earn a living in safe, sexual-harassment-free workplaces. Only last month, the Queensland parliament passed an amendment to the Industrial Relations Act 2016 to strengthen protections against workplace sexual harassment and sex or gender-based harassment. The bill today introduces respect and inclusion obligations to ensure all Queensland employees feel safe and respected in their workplace.

Chief executives will be required to take positive steps to actively foster a culture of belonging and that employees feel safe in the workplace, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. I am also pleased that we seek to reframe the relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as part of these reforms. This will include, importantly, improved cultural capability resourcing. As part of a requirement to make a 'reframing the relationship plan' through their workforce planning, this plan must identify the cultural capability of the entity when providing advice to the government and delivering services to the community. These are important measures and, given this morning's debate about a voice to parliament, absolutely crucial.

My very first job was working for the Goss government. As a young 21-year-old political staff member, I received some sage advice from an older colleague. He said, 'Remember, you will need the public servants more than they will ever need you. Always treat them well.' It is advice that I continue to follow to this day. Our public servants work hard. They are proud of the work they undertake and they deserve to be treated with respect, to be supported and to have conditions of employment that provide them with certainty and security. I commend the bills to the House.