




Speech By
James Martin

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (6.35 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and the Public Sector Bill. It is certainly one of the most important things we do as elected representatives ensuring that our system is fair and transparent. I am proud to be part of a government that always acts in the interests of Queenslanders and puts their needs first, that is committed to transparency and accountability and that is also committed to strengthening our integrity and oversight. We are lucky to live in Queensland and this is a government that is focused on delivering good jobs and great services so that we can enjoy our great Queensland lifestyle. An important part of this is that Queenslanders deserve and expect that the services that we provide, which are paid for by the state and by Queenslanders, are transparent and accountable and that our oversight framework supports a culture of accountability amongst public servants and public officials alike.

This government will always do what is best and what is right for Queenslanders. We are committed to taking Queenslanders along with us, not attacking them. We are committed to integrity in government because it is the right thing to do, unlike those opposite who disappointingly try to politicise integrity for cheap political points with no regard for truth, as highlighted earlier this year by the LNP fake news story that it cooked up which was the 'what's on your laptop conspiracy'. In relation to this false claim by the LNP and its constant use of words like 'raid' and 'seizure', the CCC has found without any doubt that there was no so-called raid, no laptop seized and nothing out of the ordinary wiped.

Mr Harper: And no apology.

Mr MARTIN: And no apology; I take that interjection. In fact, the CCC found that the circumstances in which the laptops were retrieved were entirely ordinary and the descriptions of 'raid' and 'seizure' did not reflect the reality of what occurred. Further, the circumstances in which a laptop was wiped were found to be wholly unremarkable and it also found that commentary that the LNP engaged in which suggested that laptops were seized and wiped as a result of a raid on the Integrity Commissioner's office had been a mischaracterisation of what occurred. To me this shows that the LNP does not care about integrity and it does not care about the truth. In fact, the CCC went further and found that a failure to correct the confusion and misinformation around these events may continue to erode public confidence, which is certainly very disappointing.

When it comes to integrity, the LNP does not mind destroying public confidence if it thinks that it can get some political benefit. This false narrative around the laptop and cooking up a conspiracy that was its raid on the Integrity Commission is very concerning, but what is also worryingly familiar is this idea that you can just believe anything you want and rely on alternative facts. While the CCC has warned against the spread of misinformation, the LNP has dismissed this as what it described as a different categorisation, doubling down on its conspiracy theory. This action alone to me shows a lack of integrity and also shows that the LNP has been more and more captured by the hard right, or alt-right perhaps.

There seems to be less and less room for moderate voices within the LNP and it certainly is a sorry state of affairs pandering to anti-vaxxers and science deniers. It is worth noting that ordinary Australians can see through this alternative facts rubbish. I am proud to be a Queensland and proud to be an Australian. I support our egalitarian style of democracy. This is not America; this is the Queensland parliament and I am concerned that the LNP is adopting the sorts of alternative facts approaches—these post-truth approaches—that are more commonly seen at Trump rallies than in the Queensland parliament. One cannot make things up and just shrug their shoulders when someone points out it is not true. Frankly, I think Queenslanders see through it too.

This bill supports integrity by introducing a range of reforms which come from the recommendations from Professor Peter Coaldrake's review of the culture and accountability in the Queensland public sector. As Professor Coaldrake notes in his report, when the Premier established the review she stated—

It is always good to look at things with fresh eyes. The 21st century has brought rapid changes, not least in terms of technology. We need to address that. People deserve a Public Service that is fit for purpose, geared to their needs and focused on them.

I wholeheartedly agree with that. This bill introduces a number of important improvements. Firstly, it seeks to strengthen and enhance the independence of the Auditor-General, the Audit Office and the Queensland Integrity Commissioner; secondly, it brings transparency to those who may obtain advice from the Integrity Commissioner; and, thirdly, it amends the declaration of interests requirements and strengthens the regulation of lobbyists by introducing an offence for unregulated lobbying under the Integrity Act.

In relation to the Auditor-General, the Coaldrake report recommended strengthening the independence of the Auditor-General and their office by extending its scope and that it be classified as an officer of parliament in the same way that the Queensland Ombudsman and Information Commissioner are also officers of parliament. The report also made more specific recommendations about the Auditor-General: that the Auditor-General become an independent officer of parliament; that the Auditor and their staff be employed under their own act instead of the Public Service Act; that the Auditor be allowed to set fees; and be given discretion to undertake performance audits on government owned corporations. To address any concerns about lack of independence, the Auditor-General cannot be employed within any public sector entity for two years after the end of their term which is consistent with requirements of private sector auditors who cannot work for former clients for a two-year period. I also note the minister's amendment addressing the committee chair's concerns that the Auditor not have the power to ignore an audit request by this parliament.

In relation to the Integrity Commissioner, this bill creates the Office of the Queensland Integrity Commissioner under their control and also the role of deputy. In response to concerns expressed in the Yearbury review that too many people can directly seek Integrity Commissioner advice, the bill also refines the operation and requirements in relation to the declaration of who can request official advice. Senior officers, ministerial staff members and assistant ministerial staff members will no longer be able to directly access Integrity Commissioner advice. Alternative pathways already exist for these classes of people to access integrity advice and they are intended to be used in the first instance to manage the flow and quantity of persons able to directly access the Integrity Commissioner. For public sector employees, this change is intended to redirect senior officers to seek advice from departments' ethical standards or integrity units in the first instance with advice from the Integrity Commissioner sought where required. These amendments find a balance between controlling the unintended growth of the number of designated persons who can seek advice.

The bill also makes a new offence for unregistered lobbying. This helps strengthen what are already some of the strongest laws in Australia. We do not just accept these changes, we embrace them and I am proud to be part of a government whose aim is always to do better. These changes ensure even greater openness and transparency. The changes mean that anyone working for a lobbying firm will need to be registered as a lobbyist. It covers lobbyists, consultants, advisers, strategic communications, and marketing advisers but excludes administration staff. Lobbyists are only to make contact through the chief of staff and their office and all meetings will have to be requested in writing. The Integrity Commissioner will maintain the public Register of Lobbyists but departments will also continue to maintain a register of lobbyists contacts. Ministerial diaries will continue to maintain a record of meetings. When it comes to the publishing of ministerial diaries, we have the strongest transparency laws in the country—something I am very proud of.

Moving on to the Public Sector Bill, the bill supports an integrated and responsive public sector—in particular, ensuring fairness, inclusion and security of public sector employment so that public servants can get on with the job of delivering the important frontline services for our community. There are four key aspects to the bill: firstly, it acknowledges the unique role public sector entities and employees have in supporting the government to reframe its relationship with First Nations people. The

distinct cultural rights of First Nations people will be promoted in this bill through the inclusion of responsibilities to recognise and honour Aboriginal peoples and people of Torres Strait Islander descent as First Nations people of Queensland.

Secondly, the bill creates a positive duty for public sector entities to promote equity, diversity and a culture of respect and inclusion and includes a requirement for executives to take real steps to promote equity, diversity and respect with an annual audit and a plan that must be made public and also programs and policies that promote a culture of respect and inclusion. Importantly, the bill retains the primacy of merit while reconciling this with the role that recruitment and selection play in supporting equity and diversity in public sector employment and it does this by recognising that recruitment and selection in the public sector is based on selecting the person that is best suited for the position. It includes a holistic consideration.

Thirdly, the bill ensures that public sector employees have a consistent and fair employment framework, including rights and obligations. By expanding the existing Public Service employment framework to a broader public sector, we are ensuring greater consistency. I commend the bills to the House.