




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (6.25 pm): I rise to make my contribution to this cognate debate, but I will restrict my comments primarily to the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill and leave my colleague the member for South Brisbane to comment on the Public Sector Bill. I begin by making the observation that the fact that these bills are being debated cognately is, in and of itself, a pretty blatant example of the government's efforts to limit scrutiny and to simply cut back on the amount of time we have to engage in this debate. They have effectively cut in half the amount of time for debate on the rolling integrity scandals that surround this government which ultimately led to the Coaldrake review.

For years now, Queensland media organisations have been reporting on the dodgy, suspicious links between this government and lobbyists. Campaigner lobbyists like Evan Moorhead and his firm Anacta got this Labor government elected, and he has been making profit hand over fist because of the friendly connections that he and other lobbyists have with Labor politicians. It is reported that Anacta made more than \$100,000 for a stint of work for the Premier's mate, now Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, and the Queensland government paid nearly \$80,000 to Anacta and Moorhead via government owned corporations. All this is happening while Anacta is funnelling hundreds of thousands of dollars of donations back to the Labor Party in a truly mind-blowing cycle of lawful corruption.

As with so much of this legalised corruption in the form of corporate donations to the major parties, we see only the tip of the iceberg. The Coaldrake report says that the substantial rise in recorded lobbying activity is only part of the picture, and it is likely that around three-quarters of the lobbying in Queensland is unregulated. This bill creates a new offence for unregistered lobbying. Frankly, it is laughable that such an offence did not exist already, but we support that addition. This defence is almost useless if it does not cover all instances of lobbying. Under this bill, lobbyists can continue to meet with and lobby politicians in Queensland for their own benefit, as a representative or on behalf of an industry association or to a non-minister without disclosing any details of their meetings or following any of the rules around lobbying.

The definition of lobbying in this state is so narrow that I doubt most Queenslanders would believe it. I can scarcely believe it. It is so narrow that the Premier can meet with a developer like Lang Walker and lobbyist Graham Richardson to discuss Walker's plans for Queensland—plans that include building 3,600 apartments on internationally protected wetlands at Toondah Harbour. Mind you, that is not lobbying under the act as it stands. The definition is so narrow that the government can use public money to pay a lobbying firm like Anacta to work for government owned corporations. They can use Queenslanders' money to pay a lobbying firm to talk to the government for the government, and it is still not covered under our lobbying laws. It is absurd.

It is genuinely bizarre that this bill does nothing to expand the definition of lobbying, even to capture incidental lobbying by professional firms as was recommended by Professor Coaldrake. Backbench politicians are not covered by our lobbying laws. In-house lobbyists are not covered by our

lobbying laws. Lobbyists who are lobbying for industry associations like the Queensland Resources Council or the Australian Banking Association are not covered by our lobbying laws, and this bill does nothing to change that.

We should acknowledge though that it is a pretty good time to be a former Labor staffer looking for a lobbying job and we should take an opportunity to congratulate a few people on their appointments. First there is Denise Spinks, the Premier's former deputy chief of staff who has just celebrated her anniversary in a new gig as a lobbyist with Anacta and in particular the important work in setting up its new office in Canberra. Then there is Mark Reed, the former chief of staff to Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, and Lidija Ivanovski, who was WA Labor Premier Mark McGowan's strategy adviser, who should both also be congratulated on their jobs at Anacta. Maybe that is what Labor means when it says it is delivering more jobs.

It really is extraordinary that under these laws a government member or their staff can walk straight out of parliament and into a lobbying job. A minister will have to take a little break for a couple of years, or they could alternatively just take one of the many jobs that they are still allowed to have under these laws—for example, in a company whose project they might have approved or an industry association that they helped out or as a lobbyist in a firm that lobbied them a few years before they retired. It is no wonder that in this landscape the government is still approving new coal and gas projects or that former premier Anna Bligh enjoys her comfortable position as the head of the Australian Banking Association.

An integrity bill that was concerned with anything other than dampening the critiques of this government would do so much more than this bill proposes. It would expand the definition of lobbying to include in-house lobbyists and third-party lobbyists. It would apply lobbying regulations to all politicians and senior staff. It would stop politicians and senior staff from walking into a cushy lobbying job for at least five years after they leave parliament and it would legislate a ban on cash-for-access meetings. Not only do these bills fail to implement all of the recommendations from the Coaldrake review—and in fact I would argue that they are mostly playing catch-up with a backlog of previously ignored recommendations from past inquiries and reviews—but let us remember also that the Coaldrake review itself was hamstrung by narrow terms of reference and a short time frame. Those terms of reference were of course set by a government that is ironically too afraid to actually let the sunshine in.

Professor Coaldrake had just four months to conduct this review behind closed doors, but the public can smell the rot. Slightly strengthening lobbying regulation and codifying the relationship between ministers and public servants are steps in the right direction, but they are bandaid responses to systemic corruption and corporate influence in our politics and political interference in our Public Service because the fact remains that most Queenslanders will never meet the Premier, but developers, corporations and their lobbyist representatives get private lunches with zero transparency, and that is exactly what is wrong with this system and this government. That is why coal and gas corporations, developers and the gambling lobby get special deals from this government while housing and schools and health care remain underfunded.

Corruption and corporate influence mean delay and denial on climate change. They mean long hospital waitlists, higher rents and lower wages for public servants. This bill should have properly cracked down on lobbying and banned cash-for-access meetings and corporate donations, but it has done none of those things. We support the changes in the bill to establish the Auditor-General as an officer of the parliament to create the Office of the Integrity Commissioner and ensure that the Integrity Commissioner is not subject to external direction in how it performs its functions or prioritises integrity issues. These are good steps towards increased independence of those bodies on the one hand, yet on the other hand the bill removes the existing obligation for the Auditor-General to conduct a financial audit of a public entity at the request of the parliament.

The government argues that this change, as well as the removal of the requirement for a committee, parliament or minister to request an audit, is to help the Auditor-General prioritise its work based on things like budget and public urgency without being bogged down in requests from MPs or from the parliament. However, in the committee hearing it was revealed that there has only been one request in the last 10 years from the Legislative Assembly. That may have something to do with the government holding a majority in this place, but the principle remains that parliament should be able to request an audit.

The backdrop for this bill is that there is a culture of secrecy and political interference in the Queensland Public Service. For a moment when the government introduced these reforms it seemed that it might be starting to acknowledge and address this, but on the whole its refusal to allow a full commission of inquiry in the way it has run these inquiries and the government more generally indicates that it will still go to great lengths to cut short scrutiny and silence critique. Guillotining debates, spurious

points of order, filibustering and government chairs running interference at estimates or the overreliance on commercial-in-confidence provisions to hide crucial information on things like government spending, contracts and other deals from the public are all examples.

Numerous reports including Yearbury and the Coaldrake review have pointed out the ways this government poisons and stifles our democracy. I have seen firsthand how public servants are prevented from doing their job by an overbearing politically motivated government. I have watched government chairs prohibit them from answering basic questions in committee hearings for fear that the process might result in some actual accountability or, heaven forbid, embarrassment of the government where it is failing. Yes, I will support this bill because we absolutely need greater independence for the Auditor-General and the Integrity Commissioner, but this is just cracking open the door an inch. It should be flung wide open so that we can properly deal with the culture of secrecy, the interference in the Public Service and the corporate influence that pervades every corner of politics in this state.