




Speech By
Steve Minnikin

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

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INTEGRITY AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

PUBLIC SECTOR BILL

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (2.06 pm): I rise to speak to the cognate debate of the Public Sector Bill and the Integrity and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I know there has been a fair bit of latitude regarding history and timing in relation to the contributions I have listened to thus far in this debate. I would like to state pretty clearly up-front these words: I think the Public Service has been used as a political football by both sides of the chamber for many, many years, and I note with interest that it is 30 November today. In 48 hours time it will be the 34th anniversary of the election of the Goss government, on 2 December 1989. I want to go back to the Goss government when they were first elected in 1989 and I also want to talk about Mr Peter Coaldrake, who obviously figures prominently in this debate by virtue of the report that he handed down. I want to go back and start talking from that point in time in Queensland's history.

Peter Coaldrake was the chairman of the Goss government Public Sector Management Commission in the early 1990s. He was also joined in that work by a gentleman by the name of Glyn Davis, who worked on the Public Sector Management Commission. There was another gentleman as well, a former prime minister, one Kevin Rudd, who was the chief of staff. I believe that a lot of the issues with the Public Service started back then. I heard evidence of this from a former member for Chatsworth, the late great Bill Hewitt. I am going to bring two former members for Chatsworth into my contribution today because I think what both of them told me is telling.

Bill Hewitt told me that when the Goss government was first elected it had what I would call a gulag at North Quay. A lot of the senior public servants were actually rounded up, taken there, given a very thick White Pages and told that their job thereafter was to literally get a pen or pencil and fill in the zeros in the White Pages until they stopped and then they could start on the Yellow Pages. New members may or may not know that back then the White Pages and the Yellow Pages were very thick. It was basically a task to get them to resign.

We have gone from the very genesis, I believe, of the Westminster model of public sector professionalism to starting to see where there has been—

Mr Power: Is that your argument, that we need to go back there?

Mr MINNIKIN: I will not take the interjection. I will continue with my contribution. We were then seeing that public servants were treated appallingly.

We can then roll the tape forward to successive governments. I am now talking about history on both sides of the chamber. It saddens me, having read the Coaldrake report, that there has not been a great deal learned. We seem to have come full circle when it comes to the Public Service being treated as a political football. I am honoured to have worked the first part of my career in the public sector, in the Redland shire council as it was then. Some of the best minds I have ever worked with have come from the public sector.

On election day 2015 there were storm clouds brewing—literally and metaphorically. It bucketed down with rain at the end of election day, and I knew that it would be a testing night. I knew there was probably a good chance, with the way we had treated the Public Service, that we would be consigned to political history for at least three terms. We will see what happens in two years time, but the reality is that public servants were treated in many cases appallingly. Professionally and personally, it is something that still embarrasses me to this day. I will say that there is a way you conduct yourself professionally, and that should echo the way you treat people politically as well.

I do not care about the interjections, because I have heard all of the examples toing and froing. The simple fact of the matter is that we need to get back to the Westminster model of treating the Public Service decently whereby you listen, but the minister makes decisions in concert with cabinet. At the end of the day, we need to snap back to ministerial accountability. That starts with ministers taking on board the old chestnut phrase which I think still stands the test of time—that is, full, frank, fearless advice. Whether the minister chooses to accept that or not is completely up to them, politically. We have seen the Public Service used as a political football over the last 30 years, since the early 1990s—when the Goss government first came in and with every subsequent government.

In my remaining four minutes I could quote everything that has been lifted from the Coaldrake review, but there is no need; it is on the public record. The simple fact of the matter is that Queensland works best as a state economically, because if you do not have the economic oomph going forward you will not be able to deliver all of the essential social services. One begets the other. A strong economy gives the government of the day choice to do things for the betterment of the people of Queensland. The best way to achieve that is to use the public sector and the Public Service with respect. When you do that, you give yourself the best possible chance of getting the best and brightest advice.

I have said it twice already: whether the government of the day, through their ministers, use that advice is completely up to them. That is okay, because every four years—for many years it was every three years—people will make their decision using the most powerful weapon we have in our western form of democracy here in parliament, even though there was a stain on it with the incident earlier today. Compliments to the Speaker on the way he handled that. The most powerful thing people can do is not storm in here in protest and unfurl banners; the most powerful thing is to pick up that 2B lead pencil and cast judgement on the government of the day.

I have listened with interest to the examples being used. When a government is in its third term there is hubris. There is, I believe, a complete lack of the intensity that was there in the first term or two. I draw parallels with what I saw not from within the chamber but as a keen observer outside the chamber back in 2010 and 2011, the prelude to the 2012 election. It is very simple. I hope that the government would learn from the mistakes they have made because, at the end of the day, we certainly have. We paid a huge price for the way that we went about governing from 2012 to the back end of 2014 at the early 2015 election.

We all know the classic definition of madness: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different outcome. The Leader of the Opposition has made it very clear that, going forward, the Public Service will be treated with absolute respect. It deserves no less because—I repeat my remarks earlier—when the Public Service is able to give fearless and frank advice the decision tree will work to govern Queensland in the best way. We on this side of the chamber know that we will not make those mistakes in the future.

I am proud to be the inaugural shadow minister for customer service. I think the government is sadly lacking in basic customer service delivery. In two years time, if we are given the gift and privilege of government in this state, we will work with the Public Service. As I have said already, some of the best minds I have had the privilege of working with, in both the private and public sectors, have come from the public sector. They do not want to be fearful of losing their jobs if they give certain advice. I again say that Queensland works best when the Public Service works best.