




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 17 April 2024

MOTION

Postal Voting, Privacy

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (4.44 pm): I take the opportunity to rise in support of the motion moved by the member for Noosa this evening. It is a pretty straightforward proposition. We all are familiar with this process. Every single election the major parties use these misleading postal vote application letters to harvest as much data as they can get out of constituents. Every single election I have constituents coming to me asking if it is even legal to do this. It is kind of shocking that it is. Most people do not know about the scam. I guess that is the reason it still works and why the major parties carry on with it every time.

Labor and the LNP send these postal vote applications with a prepaid envelope that sends it to a PO box owned by the party—not by the Electoral Commission of Queensland. At this point, as we have heard from my crossbench colleague the member for Hill, the parties use this data to absolutely flood the mailboxes of these residents with whatever baseless propaganda it is that they choose to send out. In a short moment, I will get to some of the lies distributed through that process. They harvest this voter data from the forms for their campaigning purposes before they send them on to the ECQ. It is incredibly unedifying and just unscrupulous behaviour. It is dodgy and it is misleading.

Importantly, it deliberately targets vulnerable people such as first-time voters who do not know any better, people who perhaps speak English as a second language or new immigrants who do not understand the voting system as well as some of us do. That is why the Greens always encourage voters to apply directly to the ECQ and never collect data from postal vote applications. I commend the member for Noosa for putting the challenge to both of the major parties just to stop doing it. Whether or not they are willing to show a bit of ticker, as we always hear the opposition leader say, and whether they are willing to show enough gumption to change the law on it, I am not sure, but just stop doing it.

At the last election we saw both Labor and the LNP set up websites with urls something along the lines of 'postalvoteQueensland.com.au' which is set up to make them look like official websites but which, again, are just a front page for the major parties to harvest personal information and make electoral gain. People looking for a postal ballot have to first hand over their email address and phone number before getting redirected to the ECQ. Pause on that for a moment. Not only is it dodgy to present an unbranded website such as this, but there is a very real risk that people—again people who are more vulnerable than average—will complete the first page thinking they have made their application for a postal vote when in fact they have not. Then they do not receive the postal vote application. They do not receive the paperwork they need, end up failing to vote and cop a fine on the back of that all so these big grubby parties can get their data and try to make the most of it.

Mr KRAUSE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I believe the member for Maiwar has used unparliamentary language. I ask him to withdraw it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Yes, you are correct, member. Member for Maiwar, I ask you to withdraw.

Mr BERKMAN: I withdraw. These unscrupulous major parties can just harvest data and do with it what they please. In the lead-up to an election, my office will often help people when they apply for postal votes. Many of these people do not use computers or the internet.

Honourable members interjected.

Mrs D'Ath: They take JobKeeper payments, the Greens political party.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr BERKMAN: Is this not precisely the practice that the Attorney-General has just claimed to use? Quietly, I think it is frankly embarrassing for the Attorney-General to get to her feet and try to defend the process—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the chair, please.

Mr BERKMAN: It is frankly embarrassing—

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I find those comments personally offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The Attorney-General has taken personal offence. Will the member withdraw?

Mr BERKMAN: I withdraw. I find it hard to believe that the Attorney-General is willing to get to her feet to try to justify these practices that are clearly underhanded and duplicitous. Clearly, they are trying to get information for purposes other than for which a person intends to provide them. With both major parties treating this scam as routine practice, it is no wonder at all that people do not trust politicians. That is before we even get to the bald-faced lies that are distributed through the post.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, I just cautioned you about unparliamentary language. I would ask you to withdraw. In terms of the rest of your speech, please make sure you do not use unparliamentary language.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you for your guidance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can you please withdraw?

Mr BERKMAN: I withdraw and I will certainly endeavour to refer to untruths or misrepresentations. Let us take a moment to pause and think about the possibility of truth in political advertising. The member for Noosa has already indicated that the federal government is contemplating removing these practices or making them unlawful. This week we have heard that the federal government is now considering legislating truth in political advertising. Why is that too good for Queenslanders? Why can we not expect that from this government? It might be a small example of misleading political conduct, but it contributes to undermining public trust in the whole electoral process. That is a big deal. That is something the government should be concerned about and they should act on it now.

(Time expired)