Speech By

Sandy Bolton

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Democracy

Ms BOLTON (Noosa—Ind) (2.58 pm): In my maiden speech in 2018 I asked everyone to close their eyes and imagine standing on the top of Mount Tinbeerwah. Today I am not going to ask you to close your eyes. Instead, I ask you to imagine what type of governments you wish to be remembered for in 10, 50 or 100 years; what type of world you would like to see for your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; and what type of parliament can deliver that. What we do right now will make the difference.

Last sitting week I mentioned five words. The first one was integrity. Just imagine a chamber where decisions are made on evidence and data that has not been cherrypicked or skewed to suit; where we play the ball; where we debate policies that Queenslanders want to hear about, whether that is housing, homelessness or legislation on major donations; where parties and politicians inspire and are seen as credible sources of information, trusted and respected. The second one was representation. Just imagine a House where there is plenty of time for Queenslanders to be heard: three- or even five-minute maximum speeches would ensure all MPs cut to the chase, reduce the filibustering and time to denigrate others; where no legislation or standing orders can silence Queenslanders or their MPs, and then there is no need to guillotine.

The third word was transparency. Just imagine where the 'push' model of information becomes a reality, reducing those RTIs, unanswered correspondence and calls in the chamber to release data—as we have been hearing about—advice and documents presented to cabinet solely to avoid publication; where grey corruption and pork-barrelling do not exist; where funds are allocated based on sound policy rather than political calculus. The fourth word was accountability. Just imagine where committees negotiate and there is no casting vote—as happens in the private and not-for-profit sector if agreement cannot be reached and members have to get back around the table until consensus is found; where responsibility for decisions then rests with both sides, ending the blame game and finger-pointing as power shifts left to right and back again.

The fifth word was scrutiny. Just imagine if the opposition was allowed and empowered to hold governments to account; where estimates and question time are free from Dorothy Dixers; reinstating a public works committee so all Queenslanders could know how much something is costing and when taxpayer funds are being wasted; where the sunk costs of abandoned infrastructure business cases and projects are clear and mandatorily reported.

Can this 'imagine' become a reality? Yes, it can. As I raised in 2021, parliamentary interns invested unicameral chambers in New Zealand, Scotland and Canada. Elements of New Zealand's system were pretty good—no chair's casting vote, committees can consider and act on petitions and there is mandatory regular review of standing orders to guard against—yes—executive dominance. These strong institutional constraints foster accountability, diverse representation and collaborative

governance. New Zealand also uses mixed-member proportional voting, MMP, which requires major parties to form coalitions or negotiate crossbench support, effectively replacing the check of an upper house with the check of multiparty consensus.

Currently, Queensland uses the single-member preferential system and requires compulsory preferential voting. This can produce large parliamentary majorities, even when they have only secured a minority of the statewide vote. With optional preferential voting currently, it seems, the preference of government, would this address the problems of our House? Sadly not according to critics, who argue it can magnify unchecked executive power by producing even larger parliamentary majorities and therefore reducing oversight. Over the years there have been calls from Queenslanders for a return of the upper house, the Hare-Clark electoral system as well as citizens assemblies, while changing governments have not delivered the needed scrutiny, accountability, representation, integrity and transparency. This is an opportunity to imagine and move beyond what we have become to what we should be. That is real leadership by every single MP in this chamber. Just imagine that. Please, just imagine it.