




Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Wednesday, 11 May 2011

**ELECTORAL REFORM AND ACCOUNTABILITY AMENDMENT BILL;
ELECTORAL (TRUTH IN ADVERTISING) AMENDMENT BILL;
ELECTORAL REFORM BILL**

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (4.53 pm): I rise to join the debate on the Electoral Reform and Accountability Amendment Bill 2011, which was introduced by the Deputy Premier and Attorney-General, the honourable member for Lytton, just last sitting week on 7 April. This is a cognate debate with the Electoral (Truth in Advertising) Amendment Bill presented to this House by the honourable member for Surfers Paradise on 19 May 2010, which I point out has sat on the *Notice Paper* for a week shy of a full year, and the Electoral Reform Bill introduced by the honourable member for Beaudesert on 24 November 2010. We are debating three bills about electoral reform that are wedged between the federal budget and the appearance of a convicted former Queensland Labor politician—a former minister to boot and a person for whom this parliament was recalled to protect only a few years ago so his mates could wax lyrical with glowing references to his exceptional good character. Some of those mates are still here and must be shuddering to think what will be exposed when Mr Nuttall visits parliament tomorrow.

I would like to be able to stand here and say it is a good sign of democracy at work to have three bills before the parliament dealing with electoral reform. Granted, the honourable member for Beaudesert's bill does address the topic of waste, but the government's bill reeks of corruption and political bias, as honourable members have heard from the shadow Attorney-General, the member for Kawana, and other members of the opposition. As my colleague the honourable member for Kawana so clearly and truthfully declared in his speech, the LNP will be opposing the government's bill as a phony sham that the Premier and her toxic government introduced in haste to bail them out of trouble. It does seem odd that the Premier is out of the country as we debate this bill and, as mentioned by the honourable member for Kawana, it has not garnered much support from Labor members to speak to it. No wonder though. It is not something to be bragging about back in their electorates, is it?

The shadow Attorney put forward a strong argument that the good people of Queensland will understand. They will see once and for all just how insincere and wretched this Labor government has become. He also flagged a number of amendments that seek to bring some fairness and balance to this legislation. However, the private member's bill from the honourable member for Surfers Paradise that seeks to amend the Electoral Act 1992 and the Local Government Act 2009 to put a stop to false and misleading electoral advertising being distributed throughout Queensland communities is commendable and deserving of bipartisan support.

This bill, introduced almost a year ago, was borne out of disgust over Bligh's counterfeit claims and promises pre and post the 2009 state election. Ensuring honest and truthful election advertising is a crucial element of a fair and just democratic electoral system. This opposition bill is about restoring confidence in our electoral process and restoring honesty in government. It is about ensuring that when people look to our state parliament, irrespective of what side of the political divide they stand on, they can respect our democratic system rather than be mistrustful of it.

The government's bill is meant to have come about from results of the integrity and accountability discussion paper of 2009 and the government's white paper, *Reforming Queensland's electoral system*, which was released in December 2010. This latter document was available for public consultation until February 2011, which many would suggest is not a time of year that people would pay it much notice as they made their preparations for the Christmas holiday season.

The government's bill proposes to amend the Electoral Act 1992 to limit political donations to candidates endorsed by a political party to \$2,000 and each political party \$5,000 for state campaigning and to cap campaign expenditure by political parties to \$80,000 per seat being contested, third parties to \$500,000 state-wide and candidates to \$50,000 for an endorsed candidate and \$75,000 for an Independent candidate. It also proposes to increase public funding to candidates and political parties based on how much they spend; provide for increased reporting requirements on campaign donations and expenditure; require political parties, candidates and third parties to establish and maintain dedicated state campaign accounts; require third parties to register with the Electoral Commission if they are going to spend more than \$10,000 campaigning during an election period or \$2,000 in a single electorate; allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote; and require postal votes to be made in an approved form.

It is anticipated that there will be considerable costs resulting from this legislation as these proposed reforms increase the amount of public funding for elections provided to political parties and candidates. But big spending Labor does not want us to know about that. Elections already cost taxpayers money. However, under this new legislation it has been revealed that these reforms could rack up an additional \$26 million spend—\$26 million from the public purse that is not going to be invested to improve our schools, roads and hospitals. This is appallingly poor timing given the dire situation many Queenslanders find themselves in after the recent summer of natural disasters and places unacceptable burdens upon them. The Premier is behaving in an unbalanced and unstable manner and must be stopped before she completely destroys our great state once and for all. She has lost all concept of responsibility, so desperate is she to hang on to power.

Not only has she and Queensland's most despised male politician, the Treasurer and honourable member for Mount Coot-tha, sold off our assets without our consent; now they want to blow another \$26 million or so under the guise of cracking down on political donations. As I have said before in this House, you can fool some of the people some of the time but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time. Unlike this self-serving Bligh Labor government, the Campbell Newman LNP team will work for Queenslanders and not for ourselves.

As this is a time for Queensland to recover from widespread flood and cyclone damage, it is not at all appropriate to be changing legislation. From the comments of people opposite, it would appear that they class as second-rate the people who have suffered during the floods and cyclone. However, it is not appropriate to change legislation to bring in laws that will cost taxpayers \$26 million. Across the state there are plenty of pressing projects that are desperate for funding assistance to assist with recovery. The Premier's flood relief appeal money has trickled out at a snail's pace, leaving householders still homeless and small businesses struggling to stay afloat.

In the Currumbin electorate, \$26 million would go a long way towards a number of overdue projects such as the widening of the M1, clearing the Currumbin bar or building the heavy or light rail system. It is no secret that the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary is desperate for funding to prop up the operating costs of its highly utilised wildlife hospital, but this miserable government has never given a brass razzoo to that precious and much loved local icon. During the last election campaign the Premier had the hide to use—or should I say exploit—this special attraction for political gain, once again proving that she has no shame.

Without doubt, most unions are affiliated with Labor. I am told that currently there are 22 affiliated unions that, under the provisions contained within this legislation, will be permitted to access \$500,000 each. Last night the honourable member for Keppel revealed as much, if not more, in his speech on the adjournment debate. I quote from *Hansard*. He said—

... the Labor Party is actually the political arm of the union movement.

Obviously Labor has the support of the unions, but just who is leading whom? It sounds like the unions are directing the parliament from outside the precinct. However, finally even some unions are waking up to the fact that affiliation with Labor is not necessarily—

Government members interjected.

Mrs STUCKEY: It is very rude to interrupt, isn't it? However, finally even some unions are waking up to the fact that affiliation with Labor is not necessarily in their best interests and they are realising that their continual financial support of the Labor Party is not fair on the workers they are supposed to represent.

Mr Watt interjected.

Mrs STUCKEY: I hope that those squawking from across the chamber will get to their feet and actually debate this legislation instead of simply sniping across the chamber. The core responsibility of unions is to look after people, which is why several years ago some very dedicated but disaffected emergency services union members broke away and created their own union, EMSPA. I stand in this House and say that I am proud to have been a catalyst in the formation of that union. Other disgruntled union members, such as the ETU's Mr Simpson, are also becoming more outspoken as Labor takes them for granted.

The government and the Deputy Premier have no qualms pushing the line 'one person, one vote'. We on this side of the House agree that this is a fundamental basis of our modern democratic system, but this bill's proposals will see the amount paid to parties per vote go from \$1.60 to upwards of \$8 and up to a whopping \$38 for the Greens. It is outrageous that the Greens will receive such an unequal payment of \$38-plus per vote for attracting a mere four per cent of the vote. Where is the fairness? I do not hear too many members opposite calling out that that is fair. They would not want that going back to their electorates, would they? The LNP believes that the amount payable per vote should be limited to no more than that received by the winning party. For example, if the winning party is to receive \$3.30 per vote then that should be the maximum that other parties receive.

This bill is not about transparency and accountability; it is more about choking the LNP. Wasn't it only in the recent 2009 election when Labor conveniently forgot to disclose a union donation of the not insignificant amount of some \$200,000 or \$300,000? One has to wonder how most on that side actually lie straight in their beds at night, or at any time for that matter. Labor politicians' ability to twist facts to suit themselves is shameful.

In 2006, the campaign for Currumbin saw Labor try every trick in the book to wrest the seat back to its fold after Merri Rose's dramatic loss. As I said after that election and I say again today, Labor spent a fortune but it could not buy Currumbin. Voters were fed up with the avalanche of mail coming through their letterboxes. In conservative terms, Labor spent some \$300,000 on that Currumbin campaign. There were five or six billboards advertising its candidate at a cost of \$12,000 each, six or seven direct-mail letters that cost \$15,000 a throw, over 15 pieces of unaddressed mail and even a last-ditch effort the day before the campaign to call everyone in the electorate to beg for a vote for the Labor candidate. On the Friday evening I came home to hear a message on my answering machine, urging me to vote for the Labor candidate.

It was a different story in the 2009 campaign. Labor deserted its candidate. Mind you, he was not too proud to allow Senator Joe Ludwig to do full-colour printing for him and direct-mail it to voters in certain suburbs, inviting them to meet him. I thought that sort of spending of federal government allowances was not allowed. But you know Labor: one rule for everyone else; another for themselves.

Now Labor has the hide to pretend to take the moral high ground by bringing in this bill with retrospective aspects around donations to fund candidates' campaigns. Meanwhile, the union movement, which is the principal financial supporter of the Labor Party as it regularly gives amounts that vary between \$2 and \$200,000, escapes the limitations of the bill. That is grossly unfair and un-Australian. Affiliation rules should apply equally to corporations, individuals and unions. That is why the honourable member for Kawana has indicated that he will be moving amendments to close the unfair loopholes in exemptions applying to unions. Complex legislation such as this is fraught with difficulties that are beyond belief. Already, we have seen the Acting Premier rush in 54 amendments. This is not the dog's breakfast that the member for Kawana labelled it; even a dog's breakfast looks good compared to this.

This afternoon I listened to the contribution of the honourable member for Cook. For a moment I found myself nodding in agreement—that is, until he tried to present an argument suggesting that donors give to the LNP for political gain or favour. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! He should ask the honourable member for Mirani about campaign funding. The unions—read 'Labor'—bankrolled a \$200,000 or \$300,000 campaign to try to unseat him, but they were unsuccessful. After what his colleague the honourable member for Keppel said in this House last night about the Labor Party being the political arm of the union movement, surely the honourable member for Cook is confused.

The honourable member for Greenslopes behaved like a true bully, launching a torrent of derogatory personal attacks on the member for Mermaid Beach, spewing out venom that says a lot more about his character than that of anyone in the LNP. When he says that he makes no apology he means it, and more's the pity. The honourable member for Kawana highlighted just a few of the amendments that he will be moving. His amendments will address the unequal playing field provisions as well as the prejudice, discrimination and favouritism that this bill would create. Under the LNP, Queenslanders will power Queensland, not politics.