



Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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**ELECTORAL AND OTHER LEGISLATION (ACCOUNTABILITY, INTEGRITY AND OTHER MATTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (4.39 pm): I rise to contribute to the Electoral and Other Legislation (Accountability, Integrity and Other Matters) Amendment Bill. From the outset, let me say that I will be opposing this bill. I am not opposing this bill due to some misguided belief that local government in Queensland is perfect. I am opposing this bill because, despite what the minister may say, this bill is about Labor attempting to save themselves. Indeed, this bill is about silencing Labor's critics and empowering their supporters. This bill is about Labor flexing their muscle against the democratic rights of every Queenslanders.

Let me be very clear that this bill is about ensuring that Labor ministers who are caught with their hand in the lolly jar, so to speak, are given a talking to instead of a prison sentence. It is that last point that concerns Queenslanders the most, and that is understandable, but that is merely one of the concerns I have with this bill and merely one reason I am opposing it.

From reading through this bill and the committee report, one thing becomes very clear. This bill is about stacking the deck in favour of the current government. There is a very simple comparison that illustrates that stacking perfectly. This bill includes an increase in funding of \$23 million toward election entitlements. It would be quite fair to ask if that is the best way to spend that money given the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic but let me move on.

Let me use this example. That amount of \$23 million is the state government's contribution toward a road project just north of Mackay that will improve flood immunity on a five-kilometre stretch of highway. In comparison, this bill provides Labor's union backers with permission to spend more on election campaigning than the current government added to the Works for Queensland program recently. In effect, those opposite are saying that their re-election is more important than helping Queensland recover from a pandemic. Those opposite are saying that their re-election is more important than, to paraphrase the Premier, 'water infrastructure, playgrounds, swimming pools, community centres and libraries'.

Whilst the LGAQ had to fight tooth and nail, with the support of the LNP, for their \$200 million that will benefit all Queenslanders, Labor and their mates were to get over \$200 million to keep those opposite in a job. With the amendments, the Labor campaign is effectively uncapped. If that is not a damning endorsement of this government's attitude towards democracy, I do not know what is.

It is not the only damning endorsement because this government now wants to control how many posters their opponents can put up. This is like something out of North Korea. I hope Queenslanders are taking notice, because it is clearly apparent that this government will do whatever it takes to retain office in this state. First, we saw the change to compulsory preferential voting with 18 minutes notice, and now we see the Attorney-General table 229 amendments with no notice which clearly demonstrates they are making policy—or in this case legislation—on the run, and that can never result in a good outcome.

It is this government that silences interest groups and not-for-profit groups, it is this government that imposes a limit on what a voter can spend supporting their political beliefs, and it is this government that shortens the period for candidates to nominate and brings forward the date for voters to register. Talk about attacking democracy!

Let me go back to the lolly jar analogy. Even though they failed to act, those opposite knew very well that one of their own was indeed caught with their hand in the lolly jar. So what do they do? They introduce legislation that, according to the chair of the CCC, 'provides a lesser penalty'. Everyone has heard about the member whose hand was caught in the lolly jar, and that is probably one very good reason to give their mates a blank cheque to spend on advertising, but it goes further. As a former police officer, I am very familiar with the Criminal Code and obviously so are some of those opposite. Section 92A of the Criminal Code refers to 'Misconduct in relation to public office' and states—

A public officer who, with intent ... to dishonestly cause a detriment to another person—

(a) deals with information gained because of office ...

is guilty of a crime.

The maximum penalty for that is seven years imprisonment.

Let me put that in layman's terms. If you use information you obtained as a public officer to create a sacrificial lamb in an attempt to cover your own failings, you can face up to seven years in jail. Where have we heard that scenario recently? But there is no need to panic when those opposite have the reins because, under their version of integrity, the maximum penalty will be two years imprisonment—and that is of course only if you can prove it was intentional. This government talk a big game on integrity but, as we have seen in their actions and as we see in this bill, it is all talk and their intent is to actually water it down.

This bill is an attack on democracy. It is an attack on integrity. It is legislation that is more akin to Stalin's Russia than it is to democratic Queensland, and it is a deliberate attempt to protect those opposite from the judgement of Queenslanders. Labor are rigging the election system by silencing corporations and giving more voice to their trade union mates. Laws that promote union influence in elections but arbitrarily limit donations from individuals and corporations are completely unfair and stack the deck in favour of those opposite.

I have no doubt that this bill will seriously undermine public confidence in the electoral system. Is it any wonder that Queenslanders are increasingly becoming disillusioned with the electoral system in this state and the constantly moving goal posts around electoral changes being made by this Labor government? I want to go to the CCC report, and I will read the conclusion section because it is important. The CCC stated—

In addition to creating a corruption risk, failing to properly declare and manage a conflict of interest undermines perceptions of the integrity of processes, and creates a lack of confidence in processes and the outcomes they lead to.

The very legitimacy of projects can be undermined. It continues—

Properly dealing with conflicts of interest is integral to the effective and efficient functioning of the public sector.

The Queensland community expects all people involved in public sector administration to adhere to the highest standards of integrity in dealing with conflicts of interest.

Moreover, the community expect the highest standards of ethical leadership—both political and within public sector agencies.

This is bad legislation. It is as simple as that. It is purely aimed at preserving a bad government and I implore all members to vote against it.