



Speech by

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ELECTORAL AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (6.53 p.m.): I support the bill being brought to this House by the Attorney-General and its being motivated by the Premier's Barcardine statement. The bill is a significant step in restoring public confidence in the political system—confidence that has been enormously eroded in recent years by the revelations at the Shepherdson inquiry of branch stacking in parts of the ALP, the sad but somewhat laughable antics of Santo Santoro in the Liberal Party and the appalling deceit of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation cronies who established a shell party which took the money of the people who genuinely supported her but which did not make them real party members.

These actions have seriously undermined public confidence in the political process. They have revealed a far too common attitude of politics as a game to be played according to any rules. But politics is not a game. It is a democratic process which has the real capacity to improve society and to make people's lives better. It is possible to take oneself too seriously in politics, but the political process itself should always be treated seriously and with respect.

The bill cleans up the constitutions of political parties, ensuring that parties' constitutions are registered with the Electoral Commission and includes, among other things, democratic and representative preselection processes. These processes will be overseen by the Electoral Commission. The requirement to lodge how-to-vote cards will remove the intrigue of the last minute and shady preference swaps, a significant element of political game playing, as will the tougher requirements for financial disclosure.

There has been substantial debate in Queensland about how to maintain the integrity of the electoral roll. While there has been some hysteria, most recently reflected in Lawrence Springborg's bill to be debated next week, it should be remembered that among the revelations of the Shepherdson inquiry, shockingly dishonourable though they were, there was never any suggestion that the outcome of an election, even in a single seat, had been influenced. In that context, this bill is right to reject the idea of it being necessary to produce ID before voting and instead to place emphasis on encouraging more people to vote, that is, practically extending the franchise.

While it may seem perfectly obvious to people engaged in modern society, that is people like us, that one should produce photo ID to vote, there are many, including older people, homeless people and people in remote communities who do not have photo ID. For instance, when I asked my grandma about it she said she did not have any photo ID at all. These people tend to be Labor voters, but not grandma. I was always of the view that conservative support for showing ID at voting time was politically motivated by an attempt to limit the franchise to Labor people. My cynicism was confirmed by the fact that one of the Howard Government's first tasks when elected in 1996 was to close down the arm of the Commonwealth Electoral Commission that moved around remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory to enrol people. Those people are, in the main, Labor voters. That was a despicable act.

The government has done the right thing to reject the idea of photo ID. It has also done the right thing to allow the ECQ access to other data held by government so that it can crosscheck and monitor the electoral roll and to facilitate the ECQ's promoting of enrolment. I have visited communities in India, the world's largest democracy, where people who live in labyrinthine slums are enrolled to vote and passionately participate in the democratic process. They are allowed to do so because genuine

efforts are made to enrol them and because those people respect and value their democracy. To vote is to participate in society, and we should do the same and encourage everyone here to vote.

I support the earlier comments of the member for Algeester, Karen Struthers, regarding the penalty provisions of this bill which place electoral rorters in the same boat as far more dangerous offenders. I very much support the intent of seriously punishing these dishonourable people who see politics as a game and who undermine the genuine efforts of people, particularly in political parties, doing the right thing. I do, however, believe that as these offenders are not a physical risk, they should be contributing to, not costing, our society. One of the steps towards justice being seen to be done is that the community should be more involved in the justice process. Having offenders visibly contribute is an important part of that.

I consider this to be an excellent bill which will make a real difference to the political process. It encourages those people involved in politics to contribute and it cuts off avenues for those playing a game. I hope that it will restore faith in the political system and that it will create an environment that encourages us to join political parties, such as the great social movement that is the ALP. I commend the bill to the House.