

ELECTORAL AMENDMENT BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from 15 June.

HON BEN DAWKINS (South West) [10.08 am]: I am using non-government business to revisit what was originally a Labor bill, the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023. It was introduced recently by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I do not propose to say too much about this bill other than that I said on my website and in my parliamentary profile that I am interested in bipartisanship. Since I have already referenced the Greens and obviously the Labor government in relation to this bill—it was originally a Labor bill—I see it as a good use of my time today to revisit it, especially given that by its very nature I also have support from the Greens given that they reintroduced it.

I do not propose to say too much. I will say that I respectfully listen, as anyone would in a new job, to the more experienced people around me, and, for example, yesterday I respectfully listened to the Leader of the House. The Leader of the House mentioned that politics is about the art of the possible. I thought that was probably a good slogan to go with today because this bill could do a lot more. It is probably a waste of time for us to talk about what else is possible. In an ideal world, we could talk about what Hon Dr Brad Pettitt talked about when he introduced the bill. We could talk about essentially disqualifying classes of donors from making donations to political parties. We could disqualify property developers, as occurs in New South Wales. Hon Dr Brad Pettitt referred to other classes of political donors. That would probably occur in an ideal world. We could also talk about other things. Effectively, I say that perfection is the enemy of the good: if we strive for perfection, we will be here all week whereas if we can move forward with something that we all agree on, we will probably discharge our duty to our electors and use our time most efficiently.

This bill is a good bill. It seeks to reduce the spending cap on disclosable donations to \$1 000. It will also put a cap on election spending. I commend the Labor government for drafting it and Hon Dr Brad Pettitt for reintroducing it. It is time for us to move on these issues. Kate Chaney, the federal member for Curtin, recently introduced into federal Parliament the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Restoring Trust) Bill 2023, and I appeal to members to recognise that the community is demanding higher standards from us and we should do things such as disclosing donations above \$1 000, which is one of the things this bill seeks to do.

Obviously, I do not control the government agenda; I can only try to work within the parameters of the cards that I have been dealt as an Independent on the crossbench. It may or may not be the case that the Labor government has other electoral reforms that it would like to achieve and that this bill may be left on the shelf. However, that is not how the Parliament should work. We should work with what is in front of us. It could take a lot of time to achieve these reforms by the time the government gets around to do whatever it intends to do next. Let us bite off small pieces—bite off what we can chew—and not take on too much. If we can strive for bipartisanship and be more accountable as a Parliament to our people by being more transparent, maybe we can restore faith in politics to a degree. That would be good. I try to refer to myself as a parliamentarian but unfortunately I think politicians are somewhere near lawyers and used car salesmen in how they are perceived in the community. Hopefully, we can change that.

Hon Darren West: What about journalists?

Hon BEN DAWKINS: Probably.

Hon Martin Pritchard: Will you take an interjection?

Hon BEN DAWKINS: Sure.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Hon Ben Dawkins has the call.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: This bill could go a lot further. I could have talked about the incorporation of political parties, which relates to the notice of motion I gave earlier to introduce a bill. I was encouraged last time. I think we are getting closer to bipartisanship because, thankfully, the Nationals WA and the Liberal Party are already incorporated in this state. Hon Pierre Yang is obviously aware of the issue I was talking about relating to incorporating political parties. That in itself makes parties more transparent.

Hon Pierre Yang: What about “The Clan”?

Hon BEN DAWKINS: The thing is that the rules of the party can be enforced through the courts if a party is incorporated. I commend the Nationals, the Liberals and the Greens (WA) for being incorporated. That exposes them to the courts and makes their internal disputes justiciable. That is not the case for the Labor Party.

Hon Kate Doust: Is that for the parties’ membership finances as you force them into courts on crazy issues sometimes?

Hon BEN DAWKINS: We do not need to pre-empt anything. The point about incorporation is that —

Hon Kate Doust: That is what it is about, isn't it—where you tie up political parties in the court processes and utilise all their resources inappropriately in the process?

Hon BEN DAWKINS: I would not agree with Hon Kate Doust on that point. Bowling clubs are incorporated and they can contest internal processes. That is how it should be. Why give \$70 million to the two major federal parties? I believe the Liberal Party is not incorporated federally.

Hon Pierre Yang interjected.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: Hang on.

To give \$70 million of taxpayers' money to unincorporated associations beggars belief. In my short time of using my electorate allowance, when I make a donation to organisations around Bunbury and so on, part of my due diligence is to see whether they are incorporated. If they are not incorporated, how can I really account to Parliament why I gave them money because I would effectively be giving it to an individual, and it is unregulated? It is about the probity of taxpayers' money.

Hon Kate Doust: So for every child seeking support to go over east for a sports competition, you don't give them a dollar because they are not incorporated associations—is that what you are saying? So every kid in your electorate misses out.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon BEN DAWKINS: So far I have given children money to attend things, but I have given the money via Good Sammy, I think, because it was managing the funds. I am happy to be corrected. If other people do it that way, I will do it. My point, Hon Kate Doust, is that it is very hard to hold people and organisations accountable for public funds, especially when we are talking about \$30 million federally to the Labor Party, when it will not incorporate. That is getting off track.

Hon Kate Doust: Member, they are held accountable because they have to provide a disclosure to the Electoral Commission, be it state or federal. Those disclosures are gone through like a dose of salts by the commission. If there are any discrepancies, they are raised and the parties have to respond appropriately and provide proof.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: But they do not have to follow their constitution or their rules because the courts have decided that because they unincorporated, their internal disputes are not justiciable.

Hon Kyle McGinn: So it's not about money; it's about internal disputes.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: It is about organisations being democratic internally, Hon Kyle McGinn. I suppose the union you come from is incorporated, and therefore has to run free and fair democratic internal processes. But when we get up to the party level, that all falls away and it is Rafferty's rules, basically.

Several members interjected.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: I do not need to talk further about incorporation because that is the subject of another bill. As I was saying, there are perfectly good reasons to extend what we are doing here today. If Hon Kate Doust is talking about being accountable for donations, for example, and declaring them, that is what this bill will do—forgetting about the incorporation bill.

Hon Kate Doust: We already do that.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: But this bill seeks to lower the threshold to \$1 000, which is what the member's party has recommended. I am hoping to get Hon Kate Doust's support for that through the reintroduction of this bill today.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: The bill has already been re-introduced.

Several members interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Hon BEN DAWKINS: Okay. Yes. I am re-introducing —

The PRESIDENT: Order, honourable member. Hon Ben Dawkins has the call and I encourage him to remain focused on the question before the house: that the bill be read a second time.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: I am sorry to Hon Matthew Swinbourn if my terminology is incorrect. It is Brad Pettitt's bill.

Hon Jackie Jarvis: Honourable.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. It is his bill I am talking about today. That is all I want to say on that.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: You are giving your second reading speech. That is what you are doing. You are giving your second reading speech in support of —

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 14 September 2023]

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Hon Ben Dawkins; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Matthew Swinbourn; Hon Kyle McGinn;
Hon Kate Doust

The PRESIDENT: Order! I encourage the member to stay focused on the content of the bill and ignore interjections that might appear to be helpful.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: No, I am taking them on board. They are quite enlightening.

Discharge of Order and Referral to Standing Committee on Legislation — Motion

HON BEN DAWKINS (South West) [10.20 am] — without notice: I move —

That the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023 be discharged and referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation for consideration and report not later than 20 February 2024.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [10.21 am]: I might take a little bit of time while everybody gets used to this new event and understands what is going on, to discuss the history of this bill. My good friend Hon Dr Sally Talbot is well aware of this particular bill and the proceeds of it. New members might want to have a look at the previous Parliament in 2020, when Hon Dr Sally Talbot was Chair of the Standing Committee on Legislation, at a time when the committee actually examined legislation, dare I say. History has changed a little bit in the interim.

Hon Martin Aldridge: The second-last report.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The second-last report. Thank you. The second-last report was produced by the legislation committee in 2020, some three and a half years ago, but never mind. Far be it from me to be critical of the work of the legislation committee. I am sure it is still a very valuable committee, despite the fact the government does not seem to need to refer legislation to it anymore. However, there is actually a report on this particular bill, as originally promoted by the Labor Party.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: I've got a copy of it.

Hon Kyle McGinn: I have a copy here.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I do not need another copy. It is a very good copy, I suppose, and I will come to the work of the committee in a little bit. As I understand it —

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: Are you supporting the referral motion?

Hon Martin Aldridge: Give him a chance to speak and you might find out.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has the call on the question that the motion be agreed.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, President. The parliamentary secretary is a bit fired up this morning, but it is okay. We will let him go.

Hon Kyle McGinn interjected.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: I'm just curious—and impatient.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I would like a clear contribution to the debate, rather than cross-chamber chatter.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Thank you, President. I will try to ignore the gallery on the other side as much as I can. Several members interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are trying to get me into trouble, President! I know it is a Thursday morning. Just be calm; it is a Thursday. Everybody relax.

I am trying to get our heads around the history here. Effectively what happened is that Hon Dr Brad Pettitt has brought in a second bill, which is exactly the same as the previous one, as he said in his second reading speech of that bill.

Hon Kate Doust: Part of what we would call a stunt.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I am not necessarily opposed to a stunt in Parliament. I have, on very rare occasions, perhaps done the same thing myself—not that I would ever say so. I am only saying so under parliamentary privilege, so I cannot be held to account for it.

Hon Dr Sally Talbot interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Hon Dr Sally Talbot is very kind. I am not necessarily opposed to a stunt, if that is what it is. We are going back a fair bit now, but as I recall, a bill was presented in 2020, based on a 2017 election commitment. It was much to the chagrin, I must admit, of Hon Simon O'Brien and those members who were present and remember it. I will do my very best to channel my inner Hon Simon O'Brien in my contribution today. I will try to muster up some of the outrage of Hon Simon O'Brien.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: You need to lower your voice a couple of octaves.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes.

Hon Ben Dawkins; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Matthew Swinbourn; Hon Kyle McGinn;
Hon Kate Doust

A bill from the Labor Party was effectively reintroduced by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt from the Greens, and we are now using non-government members' business time for Hon Ben Dawkins to debate that. After a few minutes of debate, he has moved a motion to send it to the legislation committee. We are moving a motion to send the same bill from 2020 to the same committee in 2023. This might be the easiest job my good friend Hon Dr Sally Talbot has ever had. All she has to do is get the staff to change the dates and the names on the committee. Potentially, it is a very easy cut-and-paste, I suspect.

Hon Darren West: It will be a different report number, too.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Sorry, it will be a different report number. When we get back to committee reports, we can discuss this as we go through the bill.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: It justifies it, doesn't it?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is right. They do receive a slight additional salary for the work they do on the legislation committee.

Just to summarise, before I deal with some of the details, the standard that we have come to in the Legislative Council is that we are currently debating a motion to move the same bill as the 2020 bill, to the same committee, with the expectation that perhaps we might get a different outcome. I believe it was Einstein who said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different outcome. Einstein had some very good quotes, actually. Apparently, he was a very bright man—never met him myself. Insanity is doing the same thing but expecting a different outcome. We are now going to refer the same bill —

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: It's all relative.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is not bad. I will pay that one.

We are going to refer the same bill to the same committee and presumably get the same report, although we might be crazy enough to think that we might get a different report.

Hon Ben Dawkins' contribution suggested that people hold Parliament and parliamentarians in poor repute. The suggestion was that people do not hold us in high esteem. Can I say, the process we have just witnessed is evidence of that, because this process is entirely repetitive. President, from the outset, in case there is any doubt, I do not support the bill. However, process is process, and away we go through it. I am happy to explain in a little bit. The reality is that we are now going through this process, which I think makes us look ridiculous.

I had a look at Hon Ben Dawkins's social media, which I have to say I thought was a bit derogatory of members of Parliament generally. Not every member of Parliament is held in high esteem by me either, but I would never denigrate us all. All the members in the chamber at the moment are above par and par excellence. However, it is not necessarily universal across all the Parliaments of Australia, state and federal, that I probably hold every person in high respect. When we denigrate ourselves, we denigrate the institution of Parliament. Although no-one is perfect—well, most of the rest of the members here are not—denigrating us is not of any value. If Hon Ben Dawkins wants to see our reputation in the toilet, the best thing he can do is talk us all down. Being a member of Parliament is a pretty damn hard job, and Hon Ben Dawkins is probably finding that out. It is not easy. It is harder for Independents, because opposition members are at least part of a team.

Hon Pierre Yang: Where is your team?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: My team is represented by a couple of top-quality members at the moment!

Hon Martin Aldridge: They are preparing for private members' business.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are looking forward to future debates on issues of substance. Private members' business today looks like it is on a bit of an issue of substance, not that we necessarily agree with the self-congratulatory aspect of it. As I have said, I am not necessarily opposed to a stunt myself, but the reality is that the motion on the health of, and support given to, young persons and children is a matter of some substance.

I listened carefully to the member, and what we are looking at today is effectively, in my view, the denigration of parliamentarians. It is easier to call us polties or politicians because those terms are more derogatory. We are members of Parliament. It is easier to sneer and smirk at us when we are called polties or politicians, rather than members of Parliament. I take the view that almost all members of Parliament come into this place with good intentions—almost all. I am not choosing sides as to whether it is all those on the left or the right; almost all people come into Parliament with good intentions. To some degree, most have some of that beaten out of them over the time they are in Parliament, because it is not easy. It is actually very difficult to deliver great outcomes even for individuals, let alone wide sections of the community. It is tough. It is a tough and hard job. It is a very important job, but it is not simple. I say to people who want to be elected to the Parliament that the small wins are the ones that they will be most likely to get. Very few members of Parliament get to change society on a wide basis—the occasional Premier

and the occasional minister, and half of those changes are not for the better anyway. Very few of us get to make massive change to the structure of society. For the most part, we get to help people. I have spent my entire career in opposition. My biggest success stories have been in getting a set of traffic lights or a lollipop person on a dangerous road. We used to call them lollipop ladies, but as many men as women do it now. I give a shout-out to Bobby Castle in Margaret River, my favourite lollipop man; I always stop and have a chat with him. Our individual successes are important, but we are not very good at talking them up.

Hon Darren West: They are the most important things.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: They are. Because we are in an oppositional process, my job, to some degree, is to stand up and give the people on the other side of the chamber a hard time. Their job is to try to give it back. The fact that they are not very successful at it at the moment just means that practice is required! That is part of the job. It is part of my job to hold the government to account.

Hon Kyle McGinn: You are not very good at that either, to be honest.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I could do half an hour on Griffin Coal, but we have to get to the points on this bill.

Hon Kyle McGinn: I thought it was PFAS!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will come back to PFAS as well, my friend. Here is a bit of advice for those new to the chamber: the best issues they will have are the ones that continue for a long time and have the potential for disaster at the end of them. When the entire collapse of Griffin Coal happens and the energy system in this state is a disaster, I will have had two or three years of saying that it was coming.

Hon Kyle McGinn: It is sound policy.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The disaster that is energy policy in this state will be a gift that keeps on giving.

Hon Kate Doust: Is that like the energy policy your party put forward that was a bit like Mr Squiggle on the board—the one that you, personally, did not support?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I think Hon Kate Doust answered her own question. My comments on the previous energy policy are well known and highly public. Any attempt to embarrass me about that will fall on deaf ears.

Another piece of advice that I always give is to say what you believe and believe what you say. Even in Parliament, it is very easy to fall into the political trap of telling people what one thinks they want to hear or to fall behind the party line on occasion. People should stand for what they believe in. If Hon Ben Dawkins believes in the bill moved by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, by all means he should support it today, but the way it is being done does not reflect well on any of us or the Parliament. My advice to Hon Ben Dawkins is that he needs better advice. I am happy to give him some. He and I have talked about some of these things, but I think he needs better advice on the process to get this sort of stuff right. I suspect that we are going to debate the process rather than the function of electoral donations and electoral reform, because the process is not good. It really has made us all look a bit stupid. The world will do that for us often enough without us doing it to ourselves. My first point to everybody is that we should try to raise that level. When I talk down the policies of the government, I never talk down members opposite. Most of them are very nice people; they just happen to have a poor choice of political affiliation and are not necessarily the wisest when it comes to policy. At heart, they are genuinely good people. Denigrating them is of no value to anyone.

I have worked in both the federal and state spheres. I have been a member of the other house that shall not be named—the Voldemort of the Parliament. The general standard of the Legislative Council is a cut above the rest that I have seen. We have very good debates that are generally very respectful, even the quite tense debates. If we think back to the debates between the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney General—I think he is hardworking, but there was some dissent on that this week—and my good friend Hon Nick Goiran, some were incredibly intense, incredibly long and incredibly hard work. The Minister for Emergency Services has been in the same boat. Those debates were very tough, but they were pretty much always respectful and well done. The ministers and parliamentary secretaries in this house generally try to get answers for us. Like members on this side, they are somewhat stymied by the performance of their ministers in the other place, but I realise that they cannot impact and change that. The standard of debate here is very good. Let us start by not denigrating the political process. To be honest, when we start talking ourselves down, why would everybody else not do the same?

Hon Ben Dawkins: Why won't the Liberals support reducing the threshold for disclosures to \$1 000?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will come to that.

Hon Ben Dawkins: I mean, are you hiding something?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I will come to that. Actually, we can deal with it now. I will come straight to the question, although I am not going to speak on behalf of the entire Liberal Party at the moment. When this bill

was first presented in 2020, we opposed what the government was trying to do because it takes a significant amount of money, fundraising and incredibly hard work to win enough seats to form government and govern for the benefit of the people of Western Australia. That is in the prayers that the President presents. I am waxing lyrical; sorry, President.

The PRESIDENT: I am just encouraging you to come back to the question before the house.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The President is quite right. I was trying to answer the question that had been asked by way of interjection. Perhaps I should not. The reality is that fundraising is critically important. I read the 2020 report of the Standing Committee on Legislation on exactly the same legislation. It did not go into the detail that was required of why fundraising becomes critically important to political parties. I understand that Independents and minor parties have a problem. It is very easy for them to make promises that they cannot keep and to have portfolios and agendas that they quietly push to one side that will never be delivered. The federal Greens are the best example of that. The Greens would bankrupt the country overnight with their policies, but they know they will never have to deliver them. They know they will never have to instigate things like death duties. They know they will never have to deliver. They do not need to govern but they do need to win some seats. Obviously, that has some support from members of the crossbench and Independents because they are also not in a position to ever govern for the benefit of the people of Western Australia. I understand why they would want to limit the capacity of the major political parties to exercise fundraising in the organisation required to deliver government. They have a vested interest in making sure that everybody else is more limited and I understand that. The greatest interest is always self-interest, and I absolutely get that. That drives this part of the process.

Some years ago, when I was in the other chamber, there was a debate about electoral funding. I remember this because Hon Jim McGinty was electoral affairs minister and he and I clashed regularly, and if we saw each other now, we probably still would. The debate came up of whether electoral funding would be provided. I gave a speech and said that one of the issues was not to denigrate the work of parliamentarians but accept that elections have to occur; that is the role of democracy, and it costs money to do so and do it well. Electoral funding is dedicated to delivering a better standard of Parliament, policy and politics. Therefore, I supported that bill, and electoral funding is now a part of the infrastructure of elections in Western Australia. I think that was back in the mid-2000s, so 20 years ago I was talking about raising the standard of debate, the standards we have and accepting that that costs money. But I understand that it is not part of the minor parties' processes. They do not like the fact that major parties do significant fundraising because it gives them an electoral advantage, but there is no choice.

Hon Ben Dawkins: Is robodebt part of the Liberal Party platform?

Dr STEVE THOMAS: Is robodebt part of it? I am not sure what it has to do with anything. Hon Ben Dawkins can try to score all the cheap points he wants, but the reality is we are debating what the electoral reform process looks like in Western Australia. I get Hon Ben Dawkins' anger, particularly at the Labor Party, for the position he finds himself in, but the reality is even that is not doing him any benefit.

Hon Ben Dawkins: Raise the standard.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: The standard is actually pretty high, and every time we talk it down, we make it worse.

The question is: why would we refer this document back to the Standing Committee on Legislation when it has already looked at it? It would be different if I thought the committee would look at it and come up with significantly different recommendations. They were quite functional recommendations. They asked that the Minister for Electoral Affairs comment on some of the issues in the bill and review the whole process. The recommendations that came from the Standing Committee on Legislation were incredibly functional, and it was a good report. It probably did not deal with the philosophical issues of what went on—why things are necessary or why these caps are in place. We have to bear in mind that even at that point the Standing Committee on Legislation was a Labor-dominated committee.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: No, it was not.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It was not, okay. Was Hon Matthew Swinbourn on it?

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: No.

Hon Pierre Yang: I was.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Hon Pierre Yang was, okay.

Hon Matthew Swinbourn: The members were Hon Dr Sally Talbot, Hon Pierre Yang, Hon Colin de Grussa, Hon Simon O'Brien and Hon Nick Goiran.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Okay, Hon Nick Goiran was on the committee as well.

Hon Ben Dawkins; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Dr Brad Pettitt; Hon Matthew Swinbourn; Hon Kyle McGinn;
Hon Kate Doust

I cannot see the committee coming up with different recommendations. I cannot see it looking at the current bill in terms of the functions of the previous bill and finding something different.

It was weird when the previous referral motion was debated because, members will remember, this was a commitment of the Labor Party in opposition leading into the 2017 election.

Hon Kate Doust: It was an excellent policy!

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I suspect Hon Kate Doust might have had a fair bit to do with writing it! Far be it from me to disagree and get into a stoush with Hon Kate Doust, but I suggest that it is the sort of policy that looks very good in opposition and horrendous in government. At the time, I wondered whether Hon Kate Doust was perhaps of the view that the 2017 election might not have gone the way it went, and she thought she might be in opposition. I remember the previous Premier made public comment suggesting his party would be in government for 20 years or something. Maybe Hon Kate Doust believed the rhetoric.

Let us be brutally honest, because the fun in the upper house is that we can be brutally honest. Even when this policy was developed in 2016–17, I suspect the Labor Party was probably getting more in donations from the business community than the Liberal Party.

Hon Kate Doust: No, I actually read your donation list during that period. You were getting very interesting donations from all sorts of interesting places, hence some of our comments about foreign donations in that document.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I have to admit that the part in that document about foreign donations is probably the one bit that has some value. I thought it was very soft on the donations of the union movement. This is part of the problem. For those who do not understand, the union movement donates millions of dollars to the Labor Party, and of course it is completely open for it to do so. If the Liberal Party forms government, it does not change the relationship with the unions, so the unions can be completely open. How many millions of dollars do the unions put into the Labor Party campaigns?

Hon Darren West: Probably less than the 500 Club.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: That is almost the most ridiculous statement I have heard today.

Hon Kate Doust: It might be today but it was not 10 years ago.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Even then. The union movement puts millions of dollars into the Labor Party. It is not even close; it is not even a battle. The difference is that businesses are absolutely publicly exposed in donating to other parties and they run a risk that the union movement never has. The union movement has never had to justify its links to the Labor Party, so for the most part it is happy to throw millions of dollars at the Labor Party. There is no risk to the union movement in that. There is a risk to businesses who donate. If members go through the list of donors in the disclosure as it currently exists, as Hon Kate Doust has obviously done, they will see a number of donors, the smart ones, who donate to both sides of politics.

Hon Kate Doust: Just at varying levels.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: There was a particular donor whom I will not do the disservice of naming. In the 2008 election, thanks to the Labor Party, my seat of Capel was abolished, which I took quite personally at the time. My seat evaporated and I had to contest the seat of Collie–Preston. The donor put a significant amount of money—exactly the same amount—to the Labor incumbent in Collie–Preston and me as the Liberal incumbent in Capel. I thought that the rest of it was a dastardly act, and naming the electorate Collie–Preston and removing the name of Capel was an act of corruption by the Electoral Commission in my view, but that is a whole other component.

The PRESIDENT: You might want to bring your comments back to the motion before the house, which is the referral to the committee, honourable member.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Yes.

The union movement has no issue. I think that the business community started to put big dollars into the Labor Party, which is interesting. Around the time that that legislation was being developed I suspect that the wise heads in the Labor Party suddenly realised they were getting a lot of money and if that required public exposure to the level being proposed, it would cause problems. Therefore, the bill was not one of the priority bills we debated in 2020. It was shuffled off to the end of the list where we would not have to deal with it. I think the Labor Party realised the error of its ways.

On the other hand, the Liberal Party has always recognised the risks inherent in this. We were always quite astounded. I think leaving the unions out was potentially a cheap shot, giving them a free shot, but we were always quite astounded that the Labor Party would go down this path. I think the election commitment in 2017 was very much about foreign donations. We would have had some sympathy for that. Some discussions between the two parties

about foreign donations might have seen a completely different outcome, and maybe the bill would have progressed to full debate.

Previously, the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation, which reported in late 2020. Of course, the election was March 2021, so it was not a priority bill. There was no rush to get it through. That process started in 2017. It is now six years later, and that is why Hon Dr Brad Pettitt has jumped on it and said, “I can throw your own bill up against you.” It is one of those things that perhaps government members should think about. In opposition, it is easy to throw rocks and come up with ideas that sound really good because it embarrasses the government, but at some point, the Labor Party will be back in government again and at some point the Liberal Party will be back in government again, and these things will have to be dealt with.

The reality is that there is an issue around how we fund elections. I absolutely understand the push by crossbench members to advantage themselves as a part of this, but when they do so, can they please not use it to denigrate the political process in the Parliament, because I think that is what has been happening. I think that most of the members here are trying very hard to do the right thing, and that is quite reasonable. But I find the motion to refer the same bill to the same committee in the hope that it will produce a different outcome, strange. I really do. It would have been better if somebody had referred us to the existing report. I suspect that when I sit down in a few minutes, someone in the government may well stand up and do precisely that and read out sections of it, but it does not help the argument. A sensible debate around electoral disclosures is fairly useful, but I cannot see that happening under the current circumstances. I cannot see how we are doing anything but promoting self-interest, and that applies to probably all of us, not just the crossbench. Obviously I am looking at this on behalf of the Liberal Party and members opposite are looking at this on behalf of the Labor Party, and obviously self-interest will be paramount—it generally is—but I think the current debate has been taken to the point at which we are all worse off. We are all demeaned when we start talking about the—I forget the member’s exact words in social media off the top of my head.

Hon Ben Dawkins interjected.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I forget the member’s exact words, but they were demeaning. We have too many polities; we have to get rid of some of them. Interestingly, is he one of the members he is going to get rid of?

Hon Ben Dawkins: Your seat has already been abolished a couple of times.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I have already been through the process once, but I am interested to know whether the member is included in the politicians that wants to get rid of.

Hon Ben Dawkins: If it is, so be it.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Is it that he thinks he should stay and others should go?

Hon Ben Dawkins: It’s about the taxpayer, mate.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Okay.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Can we focus on the motion before the house, please?

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: I fail to see how going over old ground helps anybody in the chamber. I fail to see how it enhances the reputation of members of Parliament across the board, including Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I see nothing wrong with him reintroducing the bill, but I kind of agree that it is a stunt. The standard of the debate that denigrates us all is a terrible position to take in the Legislative Council.

Hon Ben Dawkins: Identify the problem.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: No, the member has not—sorry, with one exception, the member has not identified the problem. The reality is that this is an incredibly destructive debate. I want everybody in the chamber to lift and to actually talk us up and the work that we do, and looking after the —

Hon Ben Dawkins: Self-promotion.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: My goodness! It is not often that I am lost for words but in this particular circumstance—holy mackerel! I do not necessarily think that there is a way to do this that is not ridiculous, but I hope that with my brief comments today, I have tried to lift the standard to a point at which the role that we all play is given the credit and significance that it deserves, but I remain doubtful that that is going to be the position from here.

The PRESIDENT: Hon Ben Dawkins has moved that the order of the day for the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023 be discharged and the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation for consideration and report not later than 20 February 2024, and the question is that the motion be agreed.

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [10.55 am]: I rise to speak to this motion that I think has some merit, and it will be useful to explain why. We have been assured by government members that Minister Quigley will be introducing an updated and improved version of the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023 that is before us today,

which is good news. We do not know when that will happen, but it would be fair to say that when a bill of this nature is reintroduced, we can rationally expect a couple of things. First, it will not be hugely dissimilar to the 2020 bill or the bill before us today, given that it was originally a Labor bill. I suspect it will be updated with some changes.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Can I interject? Are you going to introduce a different bill to update this bill?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: No. The government previously said in debate that its reason for not supporting this bill, which is its own bill, is that it will be introducing an improved version of this bill and that is why this bill should not be passed. I am taking the government at its word, but it is rational to expect that the next bill will not be hugely dissimilar.

Hon Kyle McGinn: Did the recommendations from the last report get put into your bill when you introduced it?

Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT: That is interesting. As the member knows, the recommendations in that last report were made by a committee that was dominated not by Labor Party members, but by others. As I indicated last time, I would make a series of amendments to the bill that is before us. I flagged what those amendments would be in my contribution to the second reading debate.

I come back to the motion before us today. Referring this bill to the Standing Committee on Legislation is worthwhile because, quite rationally, the government will want the updated bill to go through the Parliament relatively quickly. It would be extremely embarrassing again if a bill of this nature were not passed for a second time due to the proroguing of Parliament. The government would not want to risk that happening, so the chances of the government referring the new bill to the legislation committee is close to zero. But we still have a really good opportunity to go back and have a fresh look at this legislation.

Although I agree with some of what Hon Dr Steve Thomas said, there are good reasons for the legislation committee to have a fresh look at this bill. First, the government now has the numbers on that committee, and I do not think that this government would agree with a bunch of recommendations in that report, such as removing clause 15. Government members voted against a bunch of stuff contained in that report. In light of what we have learnt in the two years since the bill was last referred, having a fresh look at the bill would actually help. It would still be useful for the committee to reflect and advise on the new and updated bill. Of course, it would be a great opportunity for the legislation committee to finally meet, which is really important. I take on board Hon Dr Steve Thomas's comments around making sure that the quality of this debate is respectable.

At the heart of this debate—I hope we can all agree on this—is that this is very important legislation because it gives the public confidence that we as politicians and parliamentarians are showing best practice and leadership in our politics. This is an opportunity to progress this bill to a stage that I am pretty sure will not be able to happen in the 2023 version that the government will introduce. There is no downside to referring this bill to the Standing Committee on Legislation. That committee is not doing anything else. There is no downside to supporting what Hon Ben Dawkins has put forward. The upside is that we will get an updated, in-depth look at this bill, and what a best practice Electoral Amendment Bill would look like. I think that is what we all want. It is certainly something I would like to see, because when Hon Minister Quigley introduces the bill into the lower house and it ultimately comes up here, we will be able to deal with it quickly and efficiently knowing that we have all the information in front of us. That is the opportunity. For those reasons, I am very comfortable in supporting the motion to refer this bill today to the Standing Committee on Legislation.

HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.00 am]: I rise to speak on behalf of the government on its position on this attempt to refer the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023 to the Standing Committee on Legislation. From the very outset, I will make the government's position very clear: we are not supporting the referral motion. I think, to a large extent, I will adopt many of the points made by Hon Dr Steve Thomas.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: That won't do your preselection any good!

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: You keep saying nice things about me, and that does not help me either, so, either way, we are a bit screwed. I am screwed; let me make it clear!

We do not support the motion. Contrary to the points made by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, there is no merit in re-referring this bill back to the legislation committee to ask it to redo its work again. The work that was done by the previous committee stands and the report is available. I encourage Hon Ben Dawkins to read the report before he seeks to refer matters back off to the committee to ask them to redo that stuff.

Back in June, our position was made clear that we would not be supporting Hon Dr Brad Pettitt's bill. Our position has not changed. I indicated at that time on behalf of the government that we would be introducing our own legislation. We continue to have that intent and that will be happening. In those circumstances, to send this bill off

to those members who form that committee to conduct that work would essentially be a complete and utter waste of time.

I pick up on the point made by Hon Dr Steve Thomas to Hon Ben Dawkins that he needs better advice. I will add my two cent's worth to that. The member does need better advice, but he also needs to listen to that better advice when it is given to him and act on it. That is what I say to him. There is no point in people giving him good advice that he does not listen to. I ask the member to please take that on board. One particularly good piece of advice is to think about the tone at which he wants to conduct himself in this chamber and with his colleagues here, because when he goes around calling us things like simpletons and idiots, that reflects more on him than on any of us.

Hon Ben Dawkins interjected.

Hon MATTHEW SWINBOURN: I am not taking an interjection. I strongly encourage him to reflect and take some advice on the way he conducts himself, because he can prosecute the substance of his arguments without the need for personal attacks on his colleagues here. That is a choice he makes. It is a considered choice, because he puts it in writing and on his social media. He could have said, "No, that's not a well-advised thing to do; I can make the substantial points I want to make about what I think would be a better system without denigrating everybody in this chamber and the other house." I encourage him to reflect on that and on the kind of member of Parliament he is trying to be, and whether that is the kind of person he wants to be remembered as. We do him the courtesy of not publicly denigrating him on an ongoing basis on his involvement in the house. It is a matter for him whether he wants to return that courtesy, but, again, he should take some advice, listen to it and perhaps act on it.

The government does not support the referral motion. We will reintroduce an updated and improved electoral amendment bill in due course; there will be plenty of time for there to be debate on that bill when it comes and for the house to consider it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion be agreed.

Hon BEN DAWKINS: Apparently I have five minutes to reply.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Member, I am advised that you do not get a right to reply on this procedural motion.

Question put and negatived.

Second Reading Resumed

Point of Order

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: My understanding is that Hon Ben Dawkins has not spoken on the second reading debate, and if we are on the second reading debate, he can seek the call and speak. Has he spoken?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Stephen Pratt): He has spoken; he moved the referral motion during his second reading contribution.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: Sorry; you are right, so he cannot.

Debate Resumed

HON KYLE MCGINN (Mining and Pastoral — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.05 am]: There was a little confusion there, but I am glad that we are back underway and I can get up and talk on the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023 before us today. I will cover a couple of things that have come up already. I note that Hon Dr Steve Thomas said that he has never denigrated anyone in this chamber, but he has denigrated my mother; I will say that.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Your mother?

Hon KYLE MCGINN: He has attacked my mother on many occasions. He has even asked me to go to Leinster and get a haircut, which I thought was quite insulting, actually!

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: If you called a division on that, I would win!

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I say that the member should go and speak to my constituents in the Mining and Pastoral electorate, because they love it!

I will touch on a few things. Hon Dr Steve Thomas also touched on a very good point in regard to independent parties making policies and commitments that they know they will not have to enact due to potentially not being able to get into government. I agree with Hon Dr Steve Thomas about that. The federal Australian Greens is a very good example of that; we often see some very outrageous policies come out in an attempt to garner support, but we cannot quite understand how they are going to implement them.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt: This is your bill!

Hon KYLE MCGINN: The honourable member should listen to what I am saying; I am talking about the federal party at this point in time. Let us be honest: some of the outrageous stuff they have come out with makes me laugh

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about how serious they are about ever actually governing this country. I remember in the last term of this Parliament, we had a few more Greens in this chamber, and one of them, who had just finished working in the oil and gas industry, wanted to strike the oil and gas industry out completely without any transition. I could not believe it! He had just spent time on the Gorgon field himself, and then he got up and moved a motion to shut down the oil and gas industry. He profited from it and then wanted to shut it. I could not believe it!

The bill that is before us today has allowed me to look into some other areas and how election and democratic processes work around the world. The American system is interesting, because it actually has a commission for disclosure. It has its own independent department set up and structured within the American system. It is quite an interesting thing to look into. One thing I found quite interesting about the way that it operates—I do not understand how it works, by the way, because there are over 500 members in the United States Congress of the House of Representatives and the Senate—is that it goes to an election every two years. It goes to a vote every two years, but in the year between that, it goes to a public preselection, which is called a primary. US members are campaigning every 12 months. I find that really interesting. I know that we go to election every four years here in Western Australia, and I think that is a suitable time. Federally, Australian senators go to election every six years. But when members of the US Congress are going to election every two years and publicly to a primary in that off year, I do not understand how they get anything done.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: That is why the primary role of an American member of Congress is actually fundraising. Fundraising comes first.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Yes. They have to constantly fundraise, because they have to run an election every 12 months for some big or small reason.

Hon Kate Doust interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: That is right. That system is crazy, I must say. I do not think it does any favours to the quality of policy and laws that come out of that government, because the high reliance upon having to fundraise consistently would, in turn, leave next to no time for getting their job done.

It also intrigued me that one of their Senators in California has 100 staff. They have a huge amount of resources. For example, the Mining and Pastoral Region, which is the biggest electorate in the world, has two staff.

Hon Wilson Tucker: Hear, hear!

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I knew Hon Wilson Tucker would find that very interesting. I am looking forward to Hon Wilson Tucker —

Hon Wilson Tucker: A hundred would be a good number.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Yes.

Hon Darren West: You get one per 49 votes.

Several members interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Hon Darren West has created an absolute zinger: one staffer for every 49 votes, Hon Wilson Tucker! That is a zinger and a half, Hon Darren West. It is not very often that you get one zinger, but that is a purler.

Hon Darren West: One a year.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: One a year.

It is interesting that we just dealt with a referral motion, and I found it flabbergasting to be honest.

Hon Jackie Jarvis: Flabbergasting!

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Yes, I know. It is a good word, that one!

I was already reading the report from the previous Standing Committee on Legislation in respect of the Electoral Amendment Bill 2020. I wonder whether Hon Ben Dawkins had read this before moving the motion, because I did not hear a justification for moving the motion. It was quite a bizarre situation. The motion was moved, but there was no justification for why the report was not good enough to explain the bill to the member. I also think it was a bit insulting towards committee members who were on that committee. That committee produced a really good report. I read through it and thought it was a decent report.

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Since 2020, there have been two other inquiries into electoral reform, which Hon Martin Aldridge is hopefully aware of. The federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters released a report in June 2023 with recommendations for political financial reforms. The Western Australian

Electoral Commission conducted a review following the state election in 2021, with recommendations arising from that. There has been some pretty in-depth reporting since 2020. I would be interested to hear what Hon Dr Brad Pettitt—I am not sure who gets the reply.

Hon Kate Doust: There is no reply.

Hon Martin Aldridge: There is for the second reading.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I just wonder, because it was put forward by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I do not think Hon Ben Dawkins will have the right of reply. I ask Hon Dr Brad Pettitt whether he has read the two reports and whether there is anything within them that he wants to see placed into this bill. I have to go back to the member's second reading speech, it has been a while since we debated it, but my genuine question is around whether the honourable member had incorporated the recommendations out of that report. He is saying that there will be quite a few amendments to this bill, so it is not the same bill.

Hon Dr Brad Pettitt interjected.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: It is interesting that we hear it is the same bill, yet a heap of amendments will be moved by the mover of the bill. It will actually be a completely different bill, but the Greens are really good at that one. I thought that was quite a nice move to run down that way. I am looking forward to hearing from Hon Wilson Tucker, who will probably have a few things to say around this.

The government has already moved on some electoral reform, and as the hardworking parliamentary secretary, who is currently away on urgent parliamentary business, stated, a bill is coming to modernise where we are. To say that we have not had any progress is incorrect, because, as we said, some electoral reform has already been done. That debate was very broadly canvassed and I expect Hon Wilson Tucker will have a bit to say about that as well. It is going to be very interesting.

Hon Wilson Tucker: Electoral equality or electoral reform?

Hon KYLE MCGINN: I think Hon Wilson Tucker will have a say on all of it, to be honest. I think it will be interesting to see what Hon Wilson Tucker's position is on this bill. I am intrigued to see him put on the record his concern around political parties having 500 members. I think he put on the record in a previous debate that that was a concern. If I am incorrect, I will stand corrected, but I believe during the last electoral reform debate, there was an issue around a political party having to have 500 members.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Stephen Pratt): Order, members. I remind members to direct their comments through the chair.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Thanks, Acting President. It is such a broad debate in respect of trying to get answers out of it, and we only have the right of reply from Hon Dr Brad Pettitt. I ask the question to Hon Wilson Tucker and if he gets up, he will be able to answer that one.

The foreign donor aspect is problematic. It needs to be defined very clearly, because in some of the things we deal with in the electorate, it is so very hard to find out who is actually behind some of the businesses. There have been a few occasions when I have worked with an organisation that I would not expect to have investment from China or somewhere else, but I found at the back end that a foreign investor was investing in that company. It is quite difficult to decipher that. A definition would have to be very heavily worked on when defining the foreign donor clause. I also probably need to spend more time working out how a foreign donor is defined federally. There has been a lot of public debate around that over the last couple of terms in federal Parliament. I dare say, all states and the federal government will probably have to align that, have a discussion and work out what that looks like across Australia, rather than it being independent across different jurisdictions.

Hon Kate Doust: I think you will find there is a fairly generic view that donations can only be made by a person who is an Australian resident or has a business registered in Australia. It is a consistent position now.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: My question is whether that business is supported, funded or co-owned by a foreign entity.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: That becomes an issue; it can be almost impossible to tell.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: That is why I wonder how we would define it, because I do not think we can get to the bottom of that. If we do, it has to be vigorous. Recently, American legislation on that was moved regarding rare earths and minerals. It looks at FPT Corporation partners that bring in rare earths to have access to quite a healthy fund over there. One of the key principles is that there is no Chinese ownership or investment within any structure of that. It goes really deep into making sure, right down to the bottom dollar, that there is no investment outside their country. I found that quite interesting. If members want to talk more about that offline, I would be happy to.

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It has been an interesting debate today and also a very interesting move to referral. I was glad to get up and put a few things on the record. I will say that I have read through this document, and I think Hon Dr Sally Talbot and the team did a good job.

HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan) [11.19 am]: I rise to make a few comments on the matter before us today, the Electoral Amendment Bill 2023. First of all, I thank Hon Dr Steve Thomas for his very statesman-like presentation this morning in support of members of Parliament, particularly in this chamber, and the work they do.

I am going to reinforce the words my good colleague Hon Matthew Swinbourn offered to Hon Ben Dawkins about seeking advice. I am just going to say this to the member very bluntly. I think he has just blown the only 80 minutes he is going to get this year—he will have to wait until this time next year—to have a say about something significant to him as a member of this place. The member gave notice this morning of his own bill. I am surprised that he did not then think through the process and second read his own bill now.

Hon Ben Dawkins: I do not have it ready. It has to be drafted.

Hon KATE DOUST: That is quite an interesting admission. Most people would have a bill ready when they give notice of introducing it. The member might have the opportunity to read it in tomorrow or at a later stage today, so he might find himself caught out there. He is not going to have another opportunity to bring on his bill for at least 12 months—or sometime in the next 12 months. Nobody will know what he is contemplating and have an opportunity to have a discussion or a negotiation about the benefits or not of his bill. I think the advice that Hon Matthew Swinbourn gave the member is absolutely on the money.

My advice to the member is to learn the standing orders. As a lawyer I would have thought that would be the first thing that he did when he came into this place. I think that is first thing the vast majority of members do to understand not only their role but also how this place functions and operates and what our rights and responsibilities are in how we work in here. I think that talking to our extremely highly skilled Clerks and seeking advice from them or talking to other members who have been in this place for a while about how things happen or the nuances of getting things to happen, and taking that advice on board, would serve him so much better for the remaining period of his time in this place.

Hon Ben Dawkins: Who do you think wrote the thing for me? The Clerks.

Hon KATE DOUST: I am trying to be of some assistance to the member and I have only a short time. What the member has done today has been quite interesting. The member has continued the stunt that was instigated by Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and then he has sought to refer a matter that is already being dealt with, and I know that we have already had the vote on that. Having been a member of that committee in the first term—a very hardworking committee—and current member of the committee, I stand ready with my colleagues to participate in any inquiry that this Parliament chooses to refer to that committee. One of the things members need to do, whether it is a first referral or the type of referral that the member has instigated today, is give the committee riding instructions. We have to talk about what we want it to look at. It is not just the bill but it might be elements of the bill or issues associated or a stakeholder question or a matter that is being canvassed in the community that the member wants the committee to identify and focus on, and that is not what the member did today.

The member gave us 10 to 15 minutes—I am not even going to be polite—of a dog's breakfast in his approach to this whole matter before us today, and then he abruptly sought to refer it, but without riding instructions. Even if that motion had been successful, what would the committee have done? As Hon Dr Steve Thomas said, it would have adjusted the date, the title and the membership and Bob's your uncle—report back in. It could have been done in a day if that were the case. My advice to the member is to talk to people. If the member really wants to make the most of his time in this place, he should learn the standing orders and how we function.

[Interruption.]

Hon KATE DOUST: Sorry, my watch is going off. It is not my phone. I am happy to hand my watch over to somebody in accordance with the rules. I will do my Maxwell Smart impersonation and talk to the watch as I do!

In the three minutes I have left, I will say that when these types of policy changes were proposed leading up to the 2017 election, there was a lot of discussion around threshold limits for political donations, hence the proposed changes. There was a lot of discussion around real-time disclosure. My colleague Hon Kyle McGinn has referred to the American models. Our policy document at that point was based on what was happening in a range of other countries. The American system, particularly what happened in New York at the time, was very useful. It is a complicated system, and the member is right: the current arrangements in the states are that members of their respective Parliaments do not necessarily get to do the valuable work we do because when they are out of the chamber they are locked in a room on a phone canvassing for dollars. America's system is so much more complicated and I think takes away from their core business of representation. The idea of having threshold limits, having

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real-time disclosure and having it online was extremely relevant at the time. I appreciate that there are complications with doing that with not only implementation but also having the available technology to implement those changes.

I will note that the report that has just been handed down federally has a whole series of recommendations. The first few recommendations reflect some of those things that we canvassed in that original policy document leading up to the 2017 election. I am pleased to see that there is ongoing discussion around that. The recommendations deal with dropping the donation disclosure threshold to \$1 000. My colleagues can correct me, but I think if it is a federal donation, the threshold is currently \$10 000 or even more at the moment. I am pleased to see whether the feds do that because, quite frankly, that will provide absolute clarity in the mind of the voter about where money is coming from and what the purpose is.

The federal government is also looking at real-time disclosure requirements. It is considering the definition of a “gift” because we all know it is not only the dollars. It is also about what sorts of in-kind donations are made that people do not always know about.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: Can you tell us how much the federal Labor Party gets from the unions across Australia? Any idea?

Hon KATE DOUST: I cannot tell the member off the top of my head

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: It would be a lot of millions of dollars, wouldn't it?

Hon KATE DOUST: I think if we lined it up with the other donations that are made, it would probably not be as much as what we still see going from the business sector into the coffers of the Liberal Party. I will have to go back and look at that.

I am saying that I think the state government has been very sensible with its timing of this legislation that it will ultimately introduce, because we want to make sure that whatever the feds are doing, there is some synchronicity in the thresholds, the disclosures and the other factors around the public funding issues. I know that my good friend the Special Minister of State, Don Farrell, is in discussions with a range of parties federally about how this will happen. Federal Labor is hoping to introduce its bill before the end of this year. We would not want to see the state government going off and doing something entirely different that might need to be retroactively fixed. I think the fact that we have waited to get a better form of bill is entirely sensible. I go back to my advice: if the member wants to be in this place and work effectively, get the advice and stick with it.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.