

ELECTORAL AMENDMENT (FINANCE AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [2.59 pm]: I will recommence where I was before question time. I expressed quite a bit of concern about the enrolling situation on polling day because I think this will create a significant challenge for polling place employees. There are various cases around the state, even for this weekend's referendum, where polling place employees are in short supply. The government will now load up those employees with enrolment challenges on the day of polling, and I think it is a step in the wrong direction, aside from the 16-year-old situation that I mentioned before. When there is a general shortage of polling place employees, expecting them to then sit and try to filter their way through an enrolment process and a voting process, and the scenario of changing a person's enrolment when they have been previously enrolled, is a cause for concern, and that is certainly something that I want to point out.

I have a note here that says that ineligible candidates will still receive the lower reimbursement rate for primary votes, so there is a question mark over that. The bill mentions that an electronic portal will be established for political entities to upload relevant information about political contributions. It would be nice to hear from the Attorney General: What is the likely cost of the electronic portal? When will it be ready to use? Why is nothing provided in the budget for this expense? I would imagine that there will be a teething period, and the administration of various political parties will have to deal with that scenario. Will there be a trial period? I am interested in the Attorney General's answers.

As the member for Central Wheatbelt and I have pointed out many times over the years in budget estimates hearings and the like, we are concerned with the pre-polling situation. Quite frankly, regional polling booths are not used in the first week. The money is used on hand sanitiser, employees, pens, paper and all these other types of things, but the advertising is not there to match it. We spend the first week paying out all these wages, but there is no advertising to match it. Therefore, I welcome the reduction to 11 days of pre-polling, not including the Sunday, but I would also welcome a further shortening of the pre-polling period back to one week, with the previous week having solid advertising to give people a full week to know where it will happen. They will know where it will be. They will not have to rely on word of mouth to start filtering through. I can see that pattern, and it certainly is an issue. It would be good to isolate the results in regional areas that have four or five different pre-polling booths. In the 11 days preceding the election when the polling slips are sent to Perth, they would not get dumped in one big box so that we cannot ascertain what happened in which polling booth, as we can on election day. I hope that the Electoral Commissioner will see fit to retain those different polling booths—let us say four or five in a normal regional area and no doubt in metropolitan areas as well—so that people can see, within a particular area, who voted for whom. This was just something on the sidelines that I wanted to mention.

From my perspective, and as pointed out by the member for Central Wheatbelt, there are question marks around unregistered political parties. The Attorney General is gradually trying to work his way to a status whereby the Labor Party dominates everything, and then other parties that might be registered have an opportunity. But we are now seeing a pattern whereby unregistered political parties or new political parties will also be disadvantaged as well. That is concerning because we live in a democracy, or we used to, and the way this Attorney General is going, the whole status of the electoral system will have a big question mark over it. This is a democracy. We need other potential political aspirants to have a level playing field.

From my perspective, one of the biggest things is the administrative burden. I am very disappointed about the costs that will be borne up-front by administrative parts of political parties. I understand the donation scenario and the daily reporting scenario, and I am very concerned about it. I think the administrative burden on those political parties, state directors and other people will be very strong, and it is a bit disappointing that the bill does not appear to have that funding up-front to help with the administrative burden.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Would you take a little interjection there?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes.

Mr J.R. Quigley: One of the things is that if there's a new player coming in and there's a new party or new candidate, there's no basis for assessing it.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: No. I fully understand that.

Mr J.R. Quigley: I want it all even for everybody—existing and new parties.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Yes. But what I am talking about more so on this occasion is that an administrative burden will be created for political parties that are already in existence, and I am not seeing anything in the bill up-front that

will help them to administer a pretty heavy burden, as I imagine the Minister for Electoral Affairs would recognise. I am sure we will explore that at the consideration in detail stage.

Once again, the cash-for-access scenario does not seem to be pointed out anywhere in the bill that I can see. The Labor Party has been frequenting various western suburb yacht clubs and other things with its cash-for-access dinner parties. I do not know where that fits into this particular legislation.

Mr J.R. Quigley: We have them in the western suburbs because that's where so many of our supporters live!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: That is fine by me, but I want to know whether that is included in this legislation. As pointed out by the member for Central Wheatbelt, property developers and other various sectors of industry do not seem to be covered here like certain other states have covered them.

The minister pointed out at the end of his second reading speech that it was great that the government had extensive consultation with the Western Australian Electoral Commission and other electoral commissions, but he forgot to consult with the various other political parties that are involved. This was recognised by Hon Peter Collier, who pointed out that previous governments of either colour have always worked together on any changes under the Electoral Act; therefore, I think this is a dark day on which this scenario has happened. The Attorney General pointed out quite openly and publicly that he was rubbing his hands together when the Labor Party won the 2021 election and could not rewrite the legislation fast enough to change the whole upper house scenario. That will result in disadvantage for people in regional Western Australia.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Another question relates to the resourcing of the Western Australian Electoral Commission. It will have a massive burden and I do not see any extra resourcing; the Attorney General might explain that during the consideration in detail stage. There are many questions: how many people were fined at the last election? Were the fines followed up? The \$20 fine will now be a \$50 fine. What percentage of people paid that fine? What percentage of people were followed up on? Is it a case of, "Don't vote, don't worry about it, don't pay the fine and no-one will follow up"? Where is the resourcing? Is there any intention to actually follow up? Those are probably some of the main questions.

The government talks about integrity and transparency. This is its opportunity to actually demonstrate that and agree to the opposition's requests to send this legislation to the Standing Committee on Legislation. For once in this government's current four-year term, it has an opportunity to send legislation to the Standing Committee on Legislation so that it can have a decent look at it. As I said earlier, the likes of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and others have been criticised for getting paid for being on the Standing Committee on Legislation and not doing anything. Well, it is not their fault, because this government will not allow legislation to be sent to that committee. This is the sort of legislation that needs to go to that committee.

Mr J.R. Quigley: It's not our committee. It's up to the Legislative Council.

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: I am sure, with the member's influence as Attorney General, he could tell members of the Legislative Council —

Mr J.R. Quigley: I'd never presume to tell the Legislative Council anything!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: The Attorney General is saying that with a big smile on his face, but he is a man of influence and this is the time for him to show that he is the Attorney General and that he will dictate to the Legislative Council that the legislation should go to the Standing Committee on Legislation.

Mr J.R. Quigley: I tried to before, and it instigated Supreme Court proceedings! That didn't end too well, but I tried!

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Well, I think it is time that the Attorney General tried again!

I will wind up my contribution. I am very worried about the registration of how-to-vote cards; I can see chaos reigning, I really can. I know what it is like in respect of time frames and the writ. In general terms, the registration of how-to-vote cards is a good idea, but I am worried about the implementation of those time frames, the resourcing and the amount of information that will be flowing to the Western Australian Electoral Commission to try to get it to approve registered how-to-vote cards. I am very worried about the administration aspect for political parties. I am even more worried about the way in which this government is opening the door for unions to play a massive role. As we pointed out earlier, 12 unions are affiliated with the Labor Party. Let us just open the door for them to wander right in and have a major influence on the election.

Mr J.R. Quigley: What about business?

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: We have other issues. In question time today we saw that the health system is imploding and that there are cost-of-living issues and many other issues, but what are we debating? The Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Bill 2023. The government is imploding and it needs to focus on the issues that are important to the people of WA.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition) [3.14 pm]: I would like to make a contribution to the second reading debate on the Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Bill 2023. In doing so, I thank the member for Central Wheatbelt for her outline of the opposition's concerns about this legislation and the way in which it has been brought to the Parliament. She did a very good job of going through those issues, so I will not go through them all again one by one. It is a pleasure to have such a dedicated member going through the legislation and working hard through all the issues that are confronting us.

This is not the first electoral affairs bill we have seen during this term of Parliament. Very shortly after it won the 2021 election, the government set about demolishing regional representation in the upper house and, indeed, doing away with the whole concept of electorates in the upper house. It will just be an amorphous body that does not have a focus on any particular area of the state; its concerns will be entirely based on the whole of the state. Because of the size of that remit, I think the other house's activities will eventually become confined to matters of Parliament and it will be far less involved in local communities across Western Australia.

Prior to the changes this government made, there were 12 members dedicated to representing the Mining and Pastoral Region and the Agricultural Region in the upper house. They worked for communities—sometimes with, sometimes against—in some way or another, along with the eight Legislative Assembly members who represent lower house electorates within those regions. The Labor government has put forward a proposal to the Electoral Distribution Commissioner to strip away one of those eight Legislative Assembly members so that there will be only seven. If we add that to the loss of 12 regional upper house members, it will mean that instead of 20 members representing those 2.5 million square kilometres, we will have seven members. Given that one of those members represents the electorate of Geraldton, which at the moment is only about 2 000 square kilometres, it means there will be six members representing those 2.5 million square kilometres, which comes to a bit over 400 000 square kilometres each. To think people in the regions will get a fair go in terms of access to a member of Parliament in that situation is laughable. Compare that with the electorate of Mount Lawley, which is 18 square kilometres; Morley is about 20 or 22 square kilometres. Together, those two seats cover about 40 square kilometres—a little easier to get around than 400 000 square kilometres. Without upper house representation there, that really is an issue.

That aside, the purpose of the bill was outlined in the second reading speech. It states —

The purpose of this bill is to improve transparency and timeliness of political donations disclosures; ban foreign donations; introduce electoral expenditure caps; provide for state campaign accounts to be established; provide for registration of third-party campaigners; provide for registration of how-to-vote cards; increase the rate of electoral expenditure reimbursement; and modernise the arrangements under the Electoral Act 1907.

The first point is improving the transparency and timeliness of political donations disclosures. It seems to me that the continual disclosure throughout the campaign of donations and the like will be very problematic for political parties. There are a couple of issues I have around that. A number of political parties that once existed in this state no longer exist, following another of this government's electoral reforms, under which parties had to establish that they had, I think, 500 members. Parties were required to have 500 members who would sign a declaration to say, "I am a member of that party." It is not good enough for them to have paid their subs; they have to sign a piece of paper by a certain date and submit it to the Western Australian Electoral Commission. As I understand it, a number of allied parties have had members in this place; I think some are currently in this place. I think the Daylight Saving Party might be one that disappeared as a party.

Mr J.R. Quigley: No, excuse me, if you can take an interjection, under that bill, all parties that had a member in Parliament at the time of the proclamation carried on as a registered party, but they have got to be checked every 12 months.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The Attorney General has made that point by way of interjection, but I was about to go on.

I am no friend of Pauline Hanson's One Nation or the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. They are our natural competitors in regional Western Australia, but they have lost status, as I understand, as parties. What does that mean in the context of a coming election? If a person is aligned to that ethos and makes some declaration of being a supporter of Pauline Hanson, Shooters, Fishers and Farmers or some other group that has lost status, what rules apply to them? What are the disclosure rules around their supporters? Do any rules will apply to them? Can they use a party name in advertising if not on the ballot paper? I want some clarity around will happen in those circumstances, and no doubt this will play out in consideration in detail. If a number of people put, "I am one with Pauline Hanson" or something on their billboard, is that considered allowable?

Mr J.R. Quigley: Third-party campaigner.

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is what I am saying, though. What if somebody helps fund those corflutes? These are the issues I am trying to get at. I know there are differences for single candidates and political parties, but what happens with these shadow parties that everybody knows are still out there? There are probably some old members who

are maybe affiliated somehow else. I am no friend of those parties that I named in any way, but I found the concept a bit strange that the parties had to be done away with because they did not have 500 people saying that they wanted to be members. I do not get why they are not allowed to exist. If five people come together and say, “I want to make a political party”, I do not see that to be an issue. I wonder about the democratic value of that move. It is not in this bill, but it goes to the pattern that we see here. The government does away with some smaller parties that may harvest preferences and develop a momentum that is not going to go with Labor. We do away with representation in the upper house that had traditionally, although not this time around, favoured —

Mr J.R. Quigley: A conservative house.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Yes—a conservative party.

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The Attorney General has done away with that, he has just admitted, because of a political consideration—because it was a conservative house. The Attorney General just said it. Out of his own mouth, he said it.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: He rigged it. He has made his own gerrymander because he has actually set up a situation —

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I have dropped all my paperwork, so I will be in trouble here.

The government has set up a situation in which it has done away with certain parties and certain aspects of the other house. The devil is in the detail here, which I am sure is very much in favour of the Labor Party, not so much other affiliated groups. The Labor Party has lots of affiliated unions that could throw bucketloads of money into its campaigns. Other parties simply do not have that structure. Why are we setting up what seems to me to be a process that, looking at the current situation with all parties, will undoubtedly lead to Labor much more easily amassing a war chest, rather than other parties. I think the member for Roe and I am sure the member for Central Wheatbelt have spoken about the consultation involved in the development of this bill. Our parties were not consulted. The people who do the work—the secretariats—were not in any way consulted prior to this bill being brought to Parliament. One would have thought they would be involved, because I am certain that the hierarchy of the Labor Party, one way or another, has been involved, as we know that knowledge is shared between members of Parliament and party structures. Whether there has been formal or informal consultation, I am certain the Labor Party was well aware ahead of time what is in this bill. Members opposite can perhaps explain how it put in some Chinese walls to stop that happening if it did not occur. I cannot believe that the Labor Party did not have access to information about this legislation much earlier than was the case for other political parties.

I return to the point that we normally would expect a bipartisan approach, but we are not seeing that with this bill. This government seems to have done away with bipartisan approaches. We have seen a succession of electoral reform brought to this house by this government that seems to further entrench the likelihood of Labor remaining in office. I put it out there, and the Attorney General no doubt will respond with vigour when he has the opportunity.

A purpose of the bill in front of us is to ban foreign donations. That is outlined in the legislation. The question is: why have we done away with donations from one class of donor, yet property developers are not able to make donations in other jurisdictions, but that model has not been chosen in this bill? The point was made during question time or some other discussion that property developers are not the only people who rely upon decisions of government. What about miners? I do not know. Property developers are in a position in which decisions of government have a very direct relationship on their ability to do business. We have seen this situation in other states. Their core business relies upon government approval. There are natural concerns about some sectors that rely more on government decisions than other sectors, but I wonder why property developers have not been included. No doubt the minister will explain that.

The electoral expenditure caps seem to be set at a level at which it is unlikely that anyone will be capped. The idea is that third-party campaigners can spend so much money on a third-party campaign, and I think the Attorney General referenced the National Party and the mining industry campaign. This will apply only in that relatively short period after the issuing of writs. If I am not incorrect, campaigning before then will still be allowed, which means that, if you like, people can still set up an awful lot of information and can push opinion a long way before we hit the writs, and then finish off with a more modest contribution. They could still spend a bucketload of money under this legislation. I think there are huge holes in some of these matters.

We need an explanation of how state campaign accounts will work and how we will have visibility over those matters. Perhaps it will work; perhaps it will not. I am concerned about how this will actually go when we hit the 2025 campaign. We do not want teething problems and other issues to mean that the campaign is hindered.

Another issue is the registration of how-to-vote cards. I get the idea that we do not want people putting out how-to-vote cards that purport to be from a party but in fact are not and so are misleading, and we do not want incorrect how-to-vote cards, but I am very concerned about a process of approval that seems to be quite subjective. We need to know how a how-to-vote card will comply with the legislation, and we need a very clear understanding that a how-to-vote card that complies will be registered quickly. It cannot be days or weeks, because we will not have days or weeks—the ballots are done, the nominations close, and we then have to get that information printed and ready to go. There are not weeks to operate; it has to be minutes and hours, not weeks.

Mr J.R. Quigley: A couple of days.

Mr R.S. LOVE: A couple of days is not good enough in this context. That is actually a limitation. If there is a problem, it will then take another couple of days.

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: No, that will not work. I do not think that the practicality of some of these matters has been explored enough, and that goes back to the lack of consultation with parties before the matters were put into legislation.

I refer to the increase to the rate of electoral expenditure reimbursement. I am sure that every political party would welcome more funding. However, that comes at a cost, at a time when we know that people in the community are very much aware of their financial situation and burden, and I do not think it is ever a popular move to increase funding for anything to do with politics and parties.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr R.S. LOVE: As I say, the opposition has concerns about this legislation. There was a bill in the previous Parliament that never passed Parliament; it went to the Standing Committee on Legislation in the other place. In this chamber, there was quite a lot of discussion around the expenditure caps. Some aspects are similar between the bills, but many other parts of the legislation are very different from that earlier bill, which lapsed in 2021 when the Parliament was prorogued. There are questions around many of those differences; we have genuine concerns about them. From our point of view, as the opposition, we think that electoral reform should always be supported by both sides. There should be consultation with all parties and there should be a view of setting up legislation that is going to be workable and practical. I am not sure that has been achieved in this case. For that reason, we will not support the legislation. We will ask that it goes to committee to be thoroughly examined, because we have identified a whole range of issues with it, and we will identify those issues further during the consideration in detail stage.

I will wrap up my contribution now, because I know that the member for Cottesloe wants to have a say, and we are running out of time before private members' business.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe) [3.34 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate on the Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Bill 2023 and indicate my wholehearted support for the member for Central Wheatbelt's conclusion that this legislation is not worthy of support.

According to the Attorney General's second reading speech, the bill will make a host of changes to the Electoral Act, including lowering the threshold for disclosure of donations and assistance. I am intrigued about the requirement around publication of names and addresses for individuals who make those donations, but I will have a chance to cover that in a little more detail; otherwise, we will deal with it at the consideration in detail stage. This bill will ban donations from foreign actors, and we have indicated that we agree with that, although I will talk a bit about that. I think that the minister has put an escape clause in here for some reason. There will be election campaign expenditure caps; a new state campaign account for anyone participating in an election campaign, including third parties who spend more than \$500; new registration of third party campaigners; the registration of how-to-vote cards; rules on registration, disclosure and spending limits for third party campaigners who spend more than \$500; an increase to the public funding for electoral expenditure to \$4.40 from the current \$2.26 a vote; and some other changes, as well.

I think, at the outset—other members have said this and I will reinforce it—the Attorney General deserves to be condemned for the way that he has brought this bill to this Parliament. The history of electoral reform bills is that there is proper consultation with other parties before the legislation is brought to Parliament.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Give me an example!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Hon Peter Collier did exactly that when he was the minister responsible for proposing changes.

Mr J.R. Quigley: In which bill? What rubbish.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Attorney General!

Dr D.J. HONEY: With this government, we see an arrogant, high-handed approach, and, in this case, a weaponised bill. This bill is specifically weaponised against us. That is what it is about. This is not about transparency or proper disclosure; it is purely a weapon to disadvantage this side and advantage the Labor Party in the next election.

Those rules and those changes should be made on a bipartisan basis. There may be times after consultation when the government gets to the point of saying, “We’ve got to disagree with opinions”, but it should make some effort. What do we see? We see the Attorney General going out, releasing stuff to the media and talking to journalists; then, when the information gets back to us from the journalists, there is a desperate scramble by the Attorney General to say that he will give us a briefing, after he has already briefed the press. We are the secondary consideration after the press so that he can boast about the changes, or hopefully try to get the dialogue back on the government’s side, given its failures of late. That is how it should be done, and it has not been done. The Attorney General has decided to go it alone and rewrite the rules without seeking any input from other parties. I would be fascinated to know whether he sought any input even from his own party, to be frank. I wonder whether he sought input from the administrative wing of his own party, given the burden this bill will put on party administrations. I think it is almost doomed to fail and put parties in the crosshairs of potential prosecution because of the onerous provisions that this bill will bring in. I cannot imagine that the administrative wing of the Labor Party is at all enamoured with particularly the deadline for donations during the election period.

I will go through the bill. Many of the reforms are just copying what others have done in other jurisdictions, but the point is: Where is the dialogue? Where is the discussion? Where is the justification for those changes? As I have said, I think that the administrative burden will be unmanageable. Based on past performance, as has already been pointed out by the member for Central Wheatbelt, I do not think that the Electoral Commission will have the capacity to manage what will be required under this legislation to get the approval processes in on time, particularly in the heat of campaigns when we are getting close to polling day and inevitably there are changes in the how-to-vote cards as information comes up about the desirability or otherwise of recommended candidates. I have been in the thick of this, trying to get responses from the Electoral Commission on matters close to polling day, even on polling day, and it is extremely difficult.

As I said, the government has not offered evidence of where the system is failing at the moment. I think that goes to the core of it: why is the government doing this? This bill is for the Minister for Electoral Affairs to get a headline to say that he is tough on something and that he is going to solve a problem, but he has not demonstrated where the problem is.

It is fascinating. We will jump ahead a little. One of the examples the minister gave is the immense amount of money—he has said it before—that Clive Palmer poured into the election. Do you know what? Did he get a seat? No, he did not get a seat, so where was the problem?

Several members interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Members opposite might not like it that a third party that does not like them poured in money. Do they know what? The public of Western Australia —

Ms C.M. Rowe: The democratic process.

Ms S.E. Winton: You take their preferences.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Deputy Speaker, please.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! I shall look after you, member for Cottesloe.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members! Minister!

Dr D.J. HONEY: Come on! I have got to get a word out, minister—come on. The people of Western Australia saw through his ruse and they rejected him. That is what democracy is.

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The government has not demonstrated the problem. This may have irritated the government, but it has not demonstrated the problem.

Much of the focus of the amendments has been on donation disclosure rules, apparently giving greater transparency. What a farce it is for this government to talk about transparency! I have said it before and I will say it again: this is the least transparent government in the history of the state of Western Australia.

Ms C.M. Rowe interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I will explain it in detail. Ministers in this place treat the opposition with absolute contempt—one, in answering questions, and two, in particular, with freedom of information applications. The utter lack of any transparency in any information is profound. I have put in a number of freedom of information applications. I will go through a recent one. When I put those in, I expect to get back a black sheet of paper, and that is pretty well what I get. I get “and”, “this”, “but”, “is” and “was”—and that is it. Any number, figure, name or information is redacted.

That is the hallmark of this government because it cannot stand to be transparent. What a farce it is to say that this bill is about transparency from this government. Just this week I received that example. I put in an FOI application and essentially got back just black pages. That is the standard response that we see again and again. If we are going to have these rules to expose political donors, there has to be some purpose to it and there has to be some logic and reason—not just a bill that is weaponised against our side of Parliament.

If we want to talk about corruption in politics, there is one side in this house that has a track record on corruption, and that is the Labor Party. These laws were not around in the 1980s, when the Attorney General's side disgraced the Parliament of Western Australia. The phrase "WA Inc" still resonates right across our community. That is when we saw real corruption. It is an irony of history that we see the Labor Party now saying that suddenly it is worried about transparency, accountability, honesty and integrity, but in fact it is the party that has a track record of bringing this place into disgrace.

If the Labor Party were capable of upholding the expected standards of probity, transparency, accountability and integrity, we would not be discussing this bill. The truth hurts sometimes, members. I can understand the startled responses of members opposite, but that is the reality.

Mr J.R. Quigley: What is?

Dr D.J. HONEY: The corrupt behaviour of the Labor Party in this state is. Government members have had to wear that public odium for some time.

Ms S.E. Winton: So now we are going to disclose donations.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Are we? We will get to that. We will get to what they are going to disclose. I am fascinated that the Labor Party thinks that politicians can be bribed or influenced to act improperly for as little as \$500. Apparently that is the hallmark the government set for all the corruption and influence that it thinks will occur—the threshold of \$1 000. Why on earth has that threshold been set? Why has the figure of \$1 000 been chosen for donations? What is the logic behind that? The current threshold of \$2 600 is already a low threshold. No minister, party, member or candidate is going to be bribed for that amount of money.

Ms S.E. Winton: No, but the public would like to know.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is really fascinating, is it not, minister? We have a situation in which the public has a right to know. What I have in front of me here is a list of amendments. This Attorney General believes that it is inappropriate to publicise the addresses of candidates for election.

Mr J.R. Quigley: It was your side that raised it, so I agreed.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The Attorney General clearly shares that view.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Your side raised it so I agreed.

Dr D.J. HONEY: It is a broken record, Attorney General. The Attorney General clearly agreed. The government has the numbers; it can do what it likes, and it does.

Mr J.R. Quigley: It was your concern—your concern!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Attorney General.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I think we have got that point, Attorney General. I think we can all grasp that. The truth is that the Attorney General agreed to that. He has complete control. He has the numbers. He thinks that that is appropriate, yet what are we going to see? The minister and the Attorney General know the reality of donations. They come into this place and are political all the time. There is no sincerity in this; this is a weaponised bill. It is a bill that is weaponised against this side, and the Attorney General knows it. He thinks it is smart and he thinks it is a clever bill. He knows that on our side we rely heavily on the small donations.

Ms S.E. Winton: So do we!

Dr D.J. HONEY: No, what the minister relies on is the \$5 500 a head pay-for-access dinners that ministers have been lining up for, particularly ministers associated with dealing with land planning issues. They are the ministers who attract the biggest price on top of the former Premier. I am not sure the new Premier would attract the same dollars as the former Premier did. That is where the Labor Party gets its money from—coming out into my electorate and other places, as was pointed out earlier, for those big dinners. That is where the Labor Party gets the donations. What is not clear in this bill at all is whether there will be any requirement for people who attend those dinners to disclose their details as well.

Mr J.R. Quigley: They're a gift; of course they are.

Dr D.J. HONEY: When I questioned the minister on the last iteration of this bill, the answer he gave me was that they were buying the service, they were paying for a dinner.

Mr J.R. Quigley: That was a different bill.

Dr D.J. HONEY: They were buying a dinner. On top of that, we have seen people pay ludicrous prices for auction items—many thousands of dollars for a bottle of wine that is worth a few dollars. When I asked the Minister for Electoral Affairs about this last time—I would be very happy if he could clarify this—he said that they were simply overpaying for something they purchased and, therefore, it was not declared as a donation. Are they going to be declared as donations as well under this bill? Will the names and addresses of people who attend dinners priced over the \$1 000 declaration limit be published? If anyone buys an auction item over the value of the threshold limit, will that also be declarable with their name and address? They are very specific things. We know that that is how the Labor Party is making most of its money at the moment.

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Attorney General!

Dr D.J. HONEY: The incumbent government has an intrinsic advantage in that regard, because ministers in the incumbent government can use their imprimatur to attract people to high-fee dinners. The opposition does not have that capacity typically. It is much more limited.

Mr J.R. Quigley: You've got the 500 Club.

Dr D.J. HONEY: The 500 Club has to declare every donation it makes to the party.

As I said, the minister will have a chance to clarify whether those things will not have to be declared in exactly the same way. Given that many people pay several thousand dollars to attend those dinners, if they purchase an item, that will be added to it and it will be declarable. I find it absolutely fascinating how the government is going to administer that.

Why am I concerned about the low threshold? I am concerned that, because the Labor Party has form here, we will see the intimidation of people who make those donations. That is what we will see—intimidation. That is what we have seen with the despicable effort by the Yes campaign for the forthcoming Voice referendum. It has been the most disgraceful intimidation. I experienced it firsthand when I was at Corrigin. It was just vile abuse directed towards me because I was standing there.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr D.J. HONEY: That is what we are concerned about. We on this side rely almost exclusively on small donors. The minister knows that because he has seen the other returns. We rely almost exclusively on small donors, particularly for our local campaigns. The government is lowering the threshold to intimidate them into not doing it. It is to hit us. It is to damage the income for this side in election campaigns. A public servant, a union member or a contractor who does work with government will know that even if they make a very low threshold donation, their name and address will be published. We know what will happen, because Labor members are a vindictive lot. They will be intimidated. That is not transparency; that is intimidation.

My personal view—this is not the position of the opposition as such—is that an amount of around \$5 000 would have been a more meaningful threshold, because then we would be talking about an amount of money that may influence someone's behaviour. How can the minister say that members or ministers could be influenced by a \$1 000 donation and therefore it is necessary to release the private information of the individuals who make the donation but, in contrast, say that it is not okay to release the private information, including the home address, of the candidates standing for election? Tell me why it would be appropriate to release the private information of those individuals. I see that as being targeted directly at this side because we depend extremely heavily on smaller donors, particularly for state campaigns. The government is targeting us, knowing that it is comfortable in incumbency and it can get high donations from relatively fewer individuals.

We have seen some bits brought in from other areas. We have seen the lower threshold, which, as I have said, will be grossly unfair. I hope the minister clarifies—I am sure he will—the requirements for the disclosure of information. We have this concept of campaign accounts that has been lifted from other states. Presumably, that has functioned well, although it would be interesting to understand it. There will be an administrative issue for smaller parties. Imagine a party that is in the throes of a campaign and has money coming into a single account. It can pay campaign expenses only from that account, but it is trying to manage it because some money in that account will be for electorates and other activities. It will be an administrative nightmare because it will have to do all of that from a single account.

Mr J.R. Quigley: Then it would be committing an offence, and you know that. You're not allowed to do that. You have to have a state campaign account.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Under this bill, a party will not. It will be able to have a state campaign account, but all expenses will have to be paid from that. The minister should not make gratuitous insulting statements. It undoes him every time when he goes down that rathole.

In terms of foreign donations, people do not want foreign actors. Interestingly, there appears to be a sort of get-out clause in the bill. Foreign donations will be banned, but the bill has an odd clause that says that it will be okay to have foreign donations for private use. Parties cannot have them for a campaign, but they can have them for private use. I have mentioned it in this place before, and then I had a call from it afterwards. The Pew Charitable Trusts pours enormous amounts of money into politically active groups in the state of Western Australia. I think all of them are left-wing groups supporting the Greens and Labor at elections. There are various foundations of various philanthropic billionaires in the United States that are also pouring money into those same left-wing activist groups in Western Australia. Groups like the Conservation Council of Western Australia and others get money from those overseas groups, and then they are politically active before or during a campaign period. Members of those organisations come out and participate in the campaign, and one assumes that they are being paid their salary the whole time. How will that be captured? I do not understand why there is an exclusion for private use. I think that is a distinction that is an out clause. The community groups that I am talking about are exclusively green, green-left and left groups. It is something that I think could cause trouble and could allow foreign donations to influence our political processes and our elections.

There is an obvious issue with the expenditure caps, as was outlined by the member for Central Wheatbelt. On top of any expenditure cap for a party, the Labor Party has an intrinsic \$6 million advantage. As I understand it—the last time I looked at the website—12 unions are now affiliated with the Labor Party. Each of those unions, on top of any money that they donate to the Labor Party’s central campaign, can also spend \$500 000 during the campaign period, and they can obviously spend more money than that before the campaign period. It means that, intrinsically, even though they are affiliated with the Labor Party, and the Labor Party is in large part subservient to them, we have members in this place who owe their preselection to those unions. We have ministers who owe the fact that they are a minister to the influence of their union over the Labor Party. That is how intimate the link is. The link is complete. They can spend another \$6 million above what we can spend on a campaign. Members opposite might say, “Well, Woodside will do this” or “BHP did something”. We heard from the member for Central Wheatbelt about how mining companies weaponised funding against a particular site. I can tell members what they do not do. They do not come out and support our individual candidates and they do not come out and support our party.

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

Dr D.J. HONEY: They may campaign on a particular issue but I will say to the Attorney General that I think this is an area —

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, members. Unfortunately, this business —

Ms S. Winton interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Minister, thank you. Something is going on in this chamber today.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.