

## ELECTORAL REFORM — POLITICAL DONATIONS

### *Statement*

**HON BEN DAWKINS (South West)** [6.47 pm]: The title of my member statement is “Social media and standards of representation and accountability”. It appears that this has been an excellent week for political party accountability, noting that today the Minister for Electoral Affairs introduced in the other place an updated bill that is a so-called accountability measure for donations. I praise the government for these reforms on the back of Hon Dr Brad Pettitt and myself trying to re-agitate these issues. The government appears to be listening to the people, I think. The editorial in *The West Australian* today stated that “most voters view political donations with a great degree of wariness”. I ask members to listen to the community perceptions that exist in terms of a lack of accountability for political parties. It is obviously a difficult thing to do, particularly for the major parties as we are asking them to reform themselves. This is a real problem in Australia.

I seek leave to table an article by Fred Chaney, a former Australian senator, in 2021.

**Hon Pierre Yang** interjected.

**Hon Stephen Dawson** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order, members. The member is seeking leave to table a document. Is leave granted? Leave is not granted.

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** Sorry, that article was dated 4 May 2022. I quote from the article —

Parliament after parliament has shown there is no capacity to reform from within. The system needs to be changed by us, the electorate ...

Electing centrist independents would deliver the message that politics as usual is no longer acceptable. That the electorate wants a return to good government rather than endless spin and politics.

That is what I intend to be in this place—a centrist Independent. It seems that the Minister for Electoral Affairs is reading the tea leaves and can see that people want reforms such as the disclosure of political donations, which he has put forward. Does the Labor Party sense the wariness and cynicism that the public has towards things such as political donations and is actually reforming itself? The Rockingham by-election resulted in the election—I agree with Hon Kate Doust—of a very talented young woman, Magenta Marshall, who is under 30. However, it also showed a major leakage from the major parties to centrist Independents. If the Labor Party recognises that it has a problem, it can get ahead of the curve some more and adopt some of the other electoral reforms that I have talked about.

As I said in my inaugural speech, it is a sad state of affairs that a bowling club is more regulated and more accountable than a political party. If political parties were regulated, even to the standard of an incorporated bowling club, it would reduce the cynicism of the public towards the major parties and maybe arrest the electoral slide. I say “electoral slide” because the last 2021 election was an aberration caused by politicising COVID, which I know because I made campaign calls in Fremantle on behalf of the Labor Party linking staying safe to the re-election of the McGowan government. Mr McGowan is not here anymore. He is off working with his close associates in the mining sector. Maybe the next election will be different.

To highlight my point and build on the narrative by former Australian Senator Fred Chaney, when I reignited the debate on donation thresholds last Thursday, 14 September, it was interesting to see the major parties jump to their own defence, worried that better disclosure might cause them to lose donors. Part of their defence was to bring up my social media. If there are criticisms or spicy language on LinkedIn, that is where they should stay. There is no place under the standing orders for language of that type to be raised in the Parliament. I did not bring them into the house, the major parties did. Whilst on that point, even then they did not read them properly. I did not identify any individual MPs and there were no personal criticisms, only general non-identifying statements in my plea to reduce the number of seats in Parliament and return better value to taxpayers. One comment that was inaccurate was the use of the word “idiot” by one honourable member. Refer to *Hansard*. These were not my words. If the honourable member reads my LinkedIn correctly, the member will see that it was actually a quote from the WA Labor state secretary Tim Picton from 2020. I ask that if members are to quote my social media, they at least do it correctly. The honourable member putting that quote about his own party into *Hansard* is quite perverse—an own goal, you might say.

It is perfectly legitimate to talk about reducing seats. Queensland abolished the whole upper house, so how can trimming both houses be off limits or sacrilege? In answer to the questions on that day, I have no insecurity about my seat being abolished if it delivers a better return to the people. I would be happy to walk if we could reduce the wastage and greed and get rid of some seats. The truth is that the major parties operate out of self-interest. The substance of the debate last Thursday was about electoral reform and disclosing donations. Both sides leapt to their own defence to protect their own donors from being disclosed. Again, it is a matter of self-interest. That is why

there is no progress in this place. As Fred Chaney said, major parties protect their own interests, not those of the people. Preselections are manipulated, resulting in less competent MPs. The vigour with which the members attacked me on the day I was seeking electoral reform was indicative of the self-interest, self-preservation and self-promotion. Be humble and recognise the need to improve and reform and the major parties might win back the hearts and minds of the people because we know they do not trust the major parties in any way. See Fred Chaney's article. Members can find it in *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 4 May 2022, Hon Dr Steve Thomas. It is entitled "I was the deputy leader of the Liberals. The party I served has lost its way". Do not attack me for advocating for change on behalf of the people as a centrist Independent; try to get your own houses in order. As Kate and Fred Chaney have said, it is almost impossible to expect the major parties to reform themselves, but that they should reform themselves and abandon the self-interest, self-preservation and self-promotion that Fred Chaney, a senior Liberal and former senator, wrote about.

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** Did you get elected as an Independent?

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** I am now. I am enjoying it. It is quite an easy job when the major parties are struggling. Considering whether the Liberals could possibly challenge at the next election is a bit like asking Donnybrook to win next year's AFL flag—you are not even in the right league, mate.

Political parties should act in the people's interest—the public interest—and not their own, and declare all donations above \$1 000. That is what I supported. The Minister for Electoral Affairs came and sat in the upper house last Thursday. Maybe he was listening. Maybe he knows that WA Labor needs to improve to survive.

I will now turn to the elephant in the room. The Minister for Electoral Affairs proposes to double the taxpayer contribution to political parties, Hon Pierre Yang. However, his party, which is the primary beneficiary of this, has no financial governance or accountability since it is the only major party that remains unincorporated in Western Australia. The only regulation to govern the spending of that money, which is our money—the public's money—is the Australian Taxation Office. It is true that a bowling club, or any organisation receiving public money in this state, aside from WA Labor, is subject to financial regulation, transparency and accountability via the Associations Incorporations Act. WA Labor is the outlier. None of the internal processes or governance of the preselection process of this massive beneficiary of public funds are reviewable by any court or tribunal because WA Labor remains deliberately unincorporated so that it can operate with impunity on all these fronts, including the fronts on which it spends the public money, which doubled in today's proposal. For the Minister for Electoral Affairs to claim that the reforms are intended to bring transparency, integrity and accountability, which he said in today's *The West Australian*, is highly questionable. I call on members to see that by ignoring the accountability that would come with incorporation, we are, effectively, especially those in WA Labor, tarnishing our reputation even further. If members do not like the criticism, just improve. It is that simple.

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Emergency Services)** [6.57 pm]: I rise to make a brief contribution tonight on the comments made by Hon Ben Dawkins. I congratulate the Leader of the Opposition who spoke last week about Hon Ben Dawkins. I was not in the chamber when he spoke about Hon Ben Dawkins. The honourable member should be under no illusion that we are not here tonight because we want to hear from him. We do not. We are here because we have to be. His comments have been offensive over the past few weeks, whether they have been in this chamber on abortion or outside on how he has treated and called members of this chamber. You are not a centrist Independent. You are an idiot. Can I say, using language like incompetent, ineffective and ethically challenged about his colleagues in this place is offensive, and he should not say it. You are not a brave person and we are sick of you making comments like that about your colleagues. You called us simpletons —

*Withdrawal of Remark*

**Hon BEN DAWKINS:** I am aware that members are not allowed to make personal reflections. The minister just called me an idiot. I have never used that language in this house. That is a personal reflection and it is highly unparliamentary.

**The PRESIDENT:** Members, the convention in this place is that if a member takes offence in regard to a personal reflection that the member making the statement is invited to withdraw their statement. Therefore, I invite Hon Stephen Dawson to withdraw his statement.

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** Thanks, President. I appreciate your guidance. I withdraw my comment that the honourable member is an idiot.

*Statement Resumed*

**Hon STEPHEN DAWSON:** However, he is obviously idiotic. Certainly, the honourable member referred to us over the past few weeks as simpletons. Had he said it in this chamber, he would have withdrawn. But, of course,

he was not brave enough to say it in this chamber. He called us ineffectual when he is the one who is ineffectual and offensive. He is not a centrist Independent; he is just a naughty, silly boy.

*House adjourned at 7.00 pm*

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